

Femme Fatales

November

\$5.95
CAN \$7.50
UK £4.95

MAKING VAMPIR'S
ROGER CORMAN
SHOWTIME MOVIE

VAMPIRELLA

JOAN SEVERANCE
"BLACK SCORPION 2"
GINA GERSHON

Cristina Turner, filling
out Vampi's costume
as it should have been.

Volume 5 Number 5





Cover girl Cristina
Turner, once *Warp's*
toga, photographed by
Harry Langdon. Hated
Turner: "We wanted
to portray Vampirella
as the ultimate femme
fatale, unafraid of her
sexuality or her more
aggressive side."

Femme Fatales

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The Luscious Ladies of Horror, Fantasy & Science Fiction

NOVEMBER 1996

August 3rd: It's nearly 4 AM. My mind has drifted to "empty." I was going to repeat last issue's editorial, but my publisher squashed that stroke of genius. Please note that this prolific Dan Scappetti contributed no less than four profiles, including a dialogue with the plucky Gina Gershon. Last week, Don attended a Three Tenors concert, one of them was Luciano Pavarotti. I forgot who the other two tenors were, but it doesn't make much difference. They were pretty much "lost" behind Pavarotti, which disturbed the audience. Two hours into the concert, search parties were organized to find the other two tenors, but I'll get to the point.

En route to the concert, Don brushed by Candy Clark, a femme fatale who remains Hollywood's best kept secret. This may explain why she remains on the east coast. Ms. Clark—who's declined the typical Tinseltown regimen (excess surgery and cosmetic mutilation)—embraced eclectic filmmaking (MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH, Q, etc.) and more mainstream entertainment (AMERICAN GRAPPLER, BLUE THUNDER, AMITYVILLE 3-D, et al.). More next issue.

Our front cover alerts its central story on Showtime's VAMPIRELLA, a movie. But perceptive readers are likely to notice that we passed on Talia Balsu, who portrays the film's title character, as our cover woman. Why? Barbara Leigh, who often modeled as Vampirella, indirectly addressed this question on page 24. "To me, Vampirella is her costume." While Balsu is undeniably sensuous, her identification with Vampirella was lost when she challenged a strict adherence to Vampirella's trademark outfit: insisting on costume alterations, Balsu looks less like Vampirella and more like a Rockette cost as Mrs. Santa Claus in Radio City's Yuletide pageant. Thus, we recruited actress Cristina Turner—who had no quibble with the costume—as our cover woman, in deference to the very sultry Soto. I suspect readers will have no problem tracing Turner's misaction of Vampirella to the pulp heroine. Matter of fact, we recruited Turner as the red action incarnation of Vampirella. Later, Rick

Bill George



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Publisher: Frederick S. Clark. **Editor:** Bill George. **Business:** Los Angeles: Lisa Delval Berg, Annela Kincaid, Julie Strain. New York: Victor Minci, Dan Scappetti. **Books:** Tim Gruver. **Contributors:** Alan Jones, Mark Patrick Carducci, Douglas Eby, Sean Fernald, Deane Fink, Lawrence Telesky, Dan Pessino, John Thelma. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Eileen Freiler. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Tinscott-Wellington, David Selim. **Publisher's Assistant:** Lisa Collins. **Circulation:** Kevin Patterson. **Business Manager:** Colleen Curry-Clarke.

POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to: FEMME FATALES, P.O. Box 150, Oak Park, IL 60452. Please allow 4-6 weeks for change of address to take effect. **Subscription Rates:** \$19.95 per year (12 issues). Single copies \$3.95. **Advertising Rates:** \$150 per page per month. **Reprints:** \$1.00 per copy. **Copyright:** © 1996 by FEMME FATALES. All rights reserved. **Printed in USA.**

MEMBER: FEMME FATALES is a member of the International Women's Press Association. **Subscription Rates:** \$19.95 per year (12 issues). Single copies \$3.95. **Advertising Rates:** \$150 per page per month. **Reprints:** \$1.00 per copy. **Copyright:** © 1996 by FEMME FATALES. All rights reserved. **Printed in USA.**

NIGHT IS THE HUNTER

HOLLY HUNTER & DAVID CRONENBERG
FUEL A CARNAL CONTROVERSY.

BY ALAN JONES

Cannes '96: If controversy may be gauged as a barometer of success, *CRASH* turned the competition into roadkill. Audiences were outraged or downright hostile. But what did they expect? It's sex according to director David Cronenberg, a clinical cross-breeding of fatalism, fetishism and lust. Sandra Bullock, it ain't.

CRASH chronicles the erotic odyssey of Helen Remington (Holly Hunter), who—unlike her passenger husband—survives an automobile collision with motorist James Ballard (James Spader). The widowed Helen, who suffered only minor injuries, develops a perversely lustful relationship with the hospitalized James. The courtship winds down a path of automotive turn-ons and sexually subversive games of chicken. Call it carnal-

ty, they're idea of a good time is baling in the back seat of a jalopy while driving backwards, 110 mph, in the Indianapolis 500—sans brakes.

Got my drift? Pitching a mutually convenient location for our interview, I declined to ask Holly Hunter for a lift. She cut to the chase: "I'm a die-hard Cronenberg fan," admitted the Oscar-winning actress. "My absolute favorite Cronenberg movie is *DEAD RINGERS* which I found deeply, deeply moving, deeply emotional and deeply disturbing. I gotta say I really like *SCANNERS* and *THE DEAD ZONE*, too. I love the sense of humor in *THE FLY* and thought Jeff Goldblum was great in it. That's why I wanted to be in *CRASH*. If you're going to break down the Cronenberg genre, I would say *CRASH* is probably the closest to



Uncredited by *THE BURNING*, Holly Hunter succeeded in *BROADCAST NEWS* and was in *Ocean for the Piano*

DEAD RINGERS in the psychological sense. It's a movie that investigates alienation of the soul, the aloneness of us in the world."

"I think what Cronenberg really wanted to do was take morality and—us being moral creatures—lift that out of the context of this story, and then examine eroticism alongside our attraction and repulsion towards death. So morals have no value in the *CRASH* story—they're outta there! *CRASH* is primarily about the exploration of an erotic landscape after a very troubling, jolting event has occurred like an accident or a very extremely violent act. It's where people are very vulnerable to change—where the act, itself, has changed—that's when *CRASH* takes place."

Hunter's career survived a less-than-auspicious debut—the 1981 stalk-and-slash quackie *THE BURNING*—and graduated to the likes of *BROADCAST NEWS*, *THE PIANO*, *MISS FIRECRACKER*, *THE FIRM*, and *COPYCAT*, the latter co-starring Sigourney Weaver (*FF 5 4*). But never before has she played a character so far over the edge of sexual civility. "All the characters in *CRASH* are pretty much introduced to a new kind of rhythm," Hunter enthused, "—a new field of experience without judgement. Nobody judges the actions of the characters. I think they're all extremely self-involved and vulnerable and seeking some kind of contact with others but, by the same token, not completely uncomfortable with that alienation."

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CRASH: James Spader & Hunter as a perverse couple in a subversive spin on *ERED*. "We're so sophisticated with our technological evolution that we haven't kept up spiritually. We're more primitive than ever."



ing slow acting parts because my daughter's upbringing is more important." Though Smith occasionally performed sans wardrobe, it was her comical take that fanned controversy. I was on NOEL'S TELL-YEAR for 1979, advertising a shampoo. That ad was banned soon afterwards, apparently because of the joy on my face at being oiled off by a Viking! My, how times have changed.

●Indeed, only four weeks have lapsed since publication of our Heather Elizabeth Parkhurst interview—enough time for another change. We reported that Parkhurst was cast in Steven Seagal's latest demonstration of martial arts mayhem, GLIMMER MAN. "Unfortunately," relates Parkhurst, "I had to bow out of the movie. I'm locked into my contract with the Showtime cable network, and the film would have conflicted with my work schedule on the SHEWMAN OAKS sitcom. Happily, the casting director on GLIMMER MAN invited me to appear in Seagal's subsequent film."

●Speaking of Ms. Parkhurst, A few issues ago (FF 5.1, page 6), we concluded our review of CORPSE KILLER, Digital Pictures' CD interactive game, with a foot-note regarding the leading lady, Brigitte Butler. Biting no more than her midriff and gains, Butler contributed a spirited performance as "a female Carl Kolchak" (a Digital exec revealed that Butler steps down to a bikini for the game's finale; unfortunately, yours truly has been deprived of this de-nouement—I keep gettin' creamed by zombies). Our efforts to contact Ms. Butler were hindered by complications with her management (the incident was pay for an interview). Well, FF staffer Sheila Luzzier located Ms. Butler, who recalled shooting CORPSE KILLER in beautiful Puerto Rico. During the last day of shooting, the sun and moon simultaneously hung in the sky! Passed in Las Vegas, Butler—a graduate of U.N.L.V.—moved to L.A. She subsequently "fat the road" as one of Betty Midler's dancers. Butler, in fact, has been a recurrent presence on MTV, dancing in music videos tailored for Amy Grant, Eddie Murphy, Poison, Chris Isaak, Neil Young, Winger, et al.

The pretty ingenue's dramatic aptitude was discovered upon chaperoning a friend to an audition; seated in the lobby, her hair "sopping wet," Butler was bewitched by the producer for a reading. Promptly landing a role in NOWHERE TO RUN, Butler later earned acclaim time in FORD FAIRLANE, MIDNIGHT HEAT and SUNSET STRIP. Among her best friends is the aforementioned Ms. Parkhurst, who graciously "tapped-off" Luzzier to Butler's lodgings.

Butler's personal goal, to arrive as a role model for children. Matter of fact, she probing for projects that "will afford juveniles some constructive training." Sexy and sensitive, Butler's conversation is a helluva lot more intriguing than one of Sharon Stone's vanity interviews; then again, Butler is more effortlessly sexy than most of Tinseltown's "Big generation" bombshells. Hang in there, Brigitte, we're 200% behind you.

●Cassandra Giese, a screen-stealer as "The Wish" in CONAN THE BARBARIAN (1982), has slipped back into the fantasy genre for HELL'S PARADOX. The supporting cast, helmed by Robert Funtke, includes Debbie Dutch (HARD TO DIE) and Vernon Wells (ROAD WARRIOR).



Kristie Allen, whom we introduced in FF 46, is hair to the title role in series of EMMARELLE movies that stress out-of-plot. Certain scenes were shot in a 3-D process (functional for TV).

●The stars of VAMPIRE VIOLETS FROM VENUS, J.J. North and Theresa Lynn, have been reunited for BEYOND THE BRINK OF MADNESS. Cameras rolled, August 3rd, in New Jersey. The actresses portray dysfunctional siblings who are institutionalized after they're raped. Doctors eventually—and too prematurely—diagnose the petulant patients as rehabilitated. "Next thing you know, we're off on a killing spree," gins Lynn. "J.J. is the badgirl god (I'm the badgirl god)." Lynn recently wrapped her role as "Cigarette Girl," the Howard Stern icon, in Paramount's PRIVATE PARTS. "I shot for five days," recounts Lynn. "The director, Betty Thomas, used a regular on HILL STREET BLUES; hence, she could empathize with the actors. Harvesting the emotional depths, Betty was more compassionate than most directors—her 'female' spin was very pronounced and dramatically indispensable."

●The mad as a still roller-in on Athena Massey, profiled in FF 4.7. Readers are equally impressed with her comeliness (She's Rita Hayworth with a gun," gushed one fan) and conversation. So what's recently transpired with Massey's career? Plenty. Upon completing a bit in THE NUTTY PROFESSOR, she flew to Ireland for a pure role in SEARCH. "I play a homicide detective who busts serial killers," explores Massey. "It's a psychological thriller produced by Roger Corman. It has a visceral underbelly, not unlike SILENCE OF THE LAMBS and SEVEN." The actress remained in Ireland to shoot another German production, originally titled GUA-

DRENA. "It's a sci-fi film, but there's some twists in its Stranger in a Strange Land-type premise. I'm an alien who appropriates the body of a suicidal human. My own planet is crippled by a blood disease and it's up to my character to turn the tide of doom. I just heard a rumor that Mr. Corman may change the title to NOT OF THIS EARTH—PART 4." Massey also managed to squeeze-in a supporting role "for a film called POISON NY 3. I'm the housekeeper who has an affair with the man of the house—and the pool man! An actress named Jaime Pressley was cast in the 'Lola' role played by Drew Barrymore and Alyssa Milano in the preceding films." The beautiful brunette is keeping mum about her current project ("Let's just say it has something to do with STAR TREK...till you next time").

Readers have been inquiring about Body Language, photographer Doug Kirkland's book of "computer manipulated" nudes, mentioned in Massey's profile. "I was photographed as 'The Girl From the Wrong Side of the Tracks,'" smiles the actress. "The book will be on sale in early '90." But FF readers won't have to wait any longer than next issue for (a)id, exclusive photography of Massey; the ascendant star posed for our L.A. shutterbug, Jan Dean.

●Collectors of Hammer memorabilia, specifically stills/posters related to the company's repertory of actresses (Caroline Munro, Valerie Leon, Stephanie Beacham, Ingrid Pitt, et al), should rush a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Greg Tamboli, be sure to request his catalogue, which documents the sale of elusive autographs, lobby cards, scripts, et al. Address: Seummeducation 37, 4048 Zurich, Switzerland. And FF photographer Vince Muzzo is searching for Hammer-related paper (posters, photos, one-sheets, et al), and price lists to 335 Meadows Road, Babylon, NY 11704.

●Scorpio Pictures and Gold Sekuridy Entertainment, the Maryland management behind a sci-fi thriller titled GAME OF PLEASURE (FF 6.3, pages 4 & 52), are producing SKINWALKERS in Utah. Jennifer Huss, who portrayed "a virtual night nightmare" in GAME, is a contender for a rise as "the last woman on Earth" in an adaptation of a certain old classic.

●The Ministry of Film has entered into an agreement to purchase 30% of London Night Studios, ranked by Diamond Dialogue among the Top Ten game book companies in the U.S. London Night's titles, which stress "bad girl" dynamics (Doris Gunn, Razor, et al), are targeted at mature (ages 18+) audiences; worldwide circulation includes Europe, Asia and Latin America. The agreement, valued at over \$25 million, lays the groundwork for a synergistic multi-media company focused on adapting comics to motion pictures. In addition, London Night will develop comics and trading cards based on the Ministry of Film's projects and characters, including the feature film EMBRACE OF THE VAMPIRE and the HD/Cinema-sex series, EROTIC CONFESSIONS.

●MARRIA, shooting this summer, spins the tale of tale of a "dangerous love triangle." Cast includes MORTAL Kombat's Brigitte Wilson (FF 4.1), Chase Masterson ("Lusts" on STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE) and Linda Ladd. □



Here, showcasing her "wild side," actress/producer Gail Herne (P) and primetime **ALIEN** **ESCAPE** at Cannes. Left: Herne as the **NANED** **WITCH**, her take on the "true story of Elizabeth Bathory, who slaughtered 600 virgins so she could cook in rejuvenating blood baths."

VAMPIRELLA

HAMMER FILMS AND TIM BURTON TRIED, BUT ROGER CORMAN HAS CUT VAMPI LOOSE, IN THE FLESH. ON-SCREEN.

BY DENNIS FISCHER

When "comic book vixen" Wampyrella debuted in 1989, she wore sexual liberty on her sleeve—except she wasn't wearing sleeves (just a spaghetti-strap fashion statement that whispered S&M, reversing roles of submission). A hapomy Aphrodite, she voluptuously embodied the Playboy icon that provincial society branded as a "bad girl." What's more, she wielded her sexuality within a milieu of unbridled, taboo-breaking lechery: She hung out with vampires and Satanists. Immortality shielded her from the admonitions of right-wing "justice." But her male readers know she really wasn't bad—she was just drawn that way. Nevertheless, if unenlightened parents are unnerved by their offspring's attraction to a line drawing, it's likely there's gonna be a long line at the Voths.





counts, "Flesh n' blood Vampi is debuting on TV.

Rumischad pegged Tim Conway, Bo Derek, and John Saxon as co-leaders for the role. But Takina has to (FF 4-5, who has sustained popularity with the mainstream public via her "action" ethos (LICENSE TO KILL, MORTAL KOMBAT), was finally lent to the Warren Comics character. VAMPIRELLA had been originally conceived as a \$40-80 million blockbuster. Notes screenwriter Gerani, "Since you don't have the money to spend on elaborate special effects, what you do with your story and your concept is deal with a lot of imaginative ideas through the dialogue, and a lot of what happens in the course of the story. We have some special effects, but it's pretty much a character piece.

"Vampirella comes from her planet and she connects with in-

Griffith Turner models House of Mirrors' original costume for the Vampirella comic, the Vampirella that credit here says. Takina Bole stars in the Roger German production, to be cablecast on September 14. Top Right: The comic magazine's first issue in 1980. Center Right: Cover girl Barbara Leigh was cast in an aborted Hammer Films version. Bottom Right: House of Mirrors continues to publish Vampirella's sexy comic strip adventures.



teresting characters on Earth, including Adam Van Helsing (Richard Joseph Paul) who is descended from the famous Van Helsing. She actually does cross paths with a group called Operation PURGE, which is a covert military police force that exists to battle vampires. Adam's father, Conrad Van Helsing, was actually the founder of PURGE, and his son is carrying on his tradition. What happened to his father plays into our story "A stranger in a strange land, the alluring alien is embroiled with vampire exterminators and an earthly colony of vampires who are corrupted counterparts of her native Drakulones.

Vampirella was introduced in a large format black and white comic book. At least two members of the Showtime crew, who were weaned on the comic, profess their affection for Vampi. One is a starry-eyed dreamer filled with the awe of hearing actors recite his dialogue; the other is a meat-and-potatoes filmmaker more concerned with practicality than philosophy.

"I picked up the magazine back in 1969," says scripter Gernal. "The first story I ever read was called 'Death's Dark Angel,' which was written by Archie Goodwin, and I was hooked. That was perfect timing for me because I was just getting into H. P. Lovecraft at the time, and I thought, 'Wow, what a wonderful thing.' This sexy, beautifully illustrated character within the context of this wonderful, scary supernatural adventure story with Lovecraftian overtones. I was hooked."

Director Wynorski abridges his enthusiasm to, "I'm



She models the costume you won't see in VAMPIRELLA. Screenwriter Gary Gernal opines, "It didn't play, didn't work. It probably, to some degree, would have undermined her dignity."

a big fan of Vampirella. Always thought it was a cool comic strip. Read it a lot in college."

Back in the '70s, there was some interest in doing a Vampirella film, possibly under the auspices of England's Hammer Films. Barbara Leigh, photographed as Vampi for Warren comic book covers, had been tentatively cast in the plum role. But the film never came to fruition (for a complete behind-the-scenes chronicle on the film's dismantlement, check-out *FF*

4-3). "Hammer's aborted production of Vampirella's movie is the reason I left the business," recounts Leigh. "It was going to have the biggest budget of any Hammer film. Peter Cushing, a sweet and lovely man, was going to play Dracula. We tried to get it made for two years, and then everything fell apart. I was heartbroken. And now Vampirella is the reason I want to get back into the business. So I've come full circle. It's a part of my history, and the fans help keep that

part of me alive.

"When I heard about the new movie, I said to Jim Wynorski, 'Jim, put me in your movie!' But there were no roles for me so, instead, I'm going to be in a Showtime interview about the movie. And Jim called me yesterday, offering to show me footage from the new film. I have mixed emotions. I understand they changed her costume and, to me, Vampi is her costume. But we'll see."

Wynorski recalls that "Back in '68, just before BATMAN came out, I thought, 'What comic book character approximates BATMAN and doesn't belong to a big concern that would cost me a lot of money?' Vampirella came to mind. I then proceeded to track down the rights, which was a long, involved process. I had no idea who owned what. I went through lots of different channels to find out where the rights lay.

"I went through a copyright search and went to Harris [publishers of the reincarnated Vampirella comic book], and Harris wasn't really sure they owned the rights. They weren't going to give me anything until they got a sign-off from Perry [Askerman]. So I went to Perry and got him to sign-off, and then they signed off. Between that time and the time they signed, BATMAN came out—and they tried to renegotiate the rights. I said, 'Hey, we'll take you to court and sue you for a lot of money,' so they let me have the rights."

According to Wynorski, what really attracted him to the project was "the idea of making a lot of money, and working with a couple of sexy babes."

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VAMPIRELLA

COMIC BOOK ORIGINS

CONCEIVED AS A "SEXY WITCH-TYPE GAL," SHE WAS INITIALLY PITCHED AS "MARY MAYHEM" AND "SISTER SCARY."

BY MARK PATRICK CARDUCCI

It was 1968, and *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine was keeping editor Forrest J Ackerman busier than ever. James Warren, the ambitious publisher of *FM*, was equally preoccupied not only with the multi-generational monster periodical but *Creepy* and *Serie*, which were somewhat patterned on Bill Gaines' 1950's *E.C. Comics*. Business was so brisk for his horror comic magazines that Warren inaugurated a third one. But unlike the gnarly Crypt-keeper clones that served as hosts of his other illustrated publications, Warren insisted on a distinctly female presence. Could he crack the fertile imag-mind of his editor?

Forrest J Ackerman is still a busy man. Continuing to write about genre movies, he contributes regular columns to numerous fan and pro publications. Fueled by financial and creative disputes with his publisher, Ackerman resigned as editor of the revived *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. Exercising another option, he cyber-poses a biweekly column for the Sci-Fi Channel's web page.

The editor of sci-fi book anthologies, Ackerman functions as a literary agent for dozens of fantasy authors. The Ackermansion, his world-famous three-story home, remains open to visi-

ters every Saturday, a sharp and spirited 79 years old, Ackerman still delights in guiding tours of his horror/fantasy memorabilia.

Surrounded by the original Tim Sutton renderings that illustrated his origin story for *Vampirella*, Ackerman warmly reflects upon his brainchild's genesis.

"In late 1968, Jim Warren called me out of the blue," informs Ackerman. "He wanted to start up a new comic about a gothic—'mod witch'—*squisette*. He asked me what I might name her."

"Well, just off the top of

Forrest J Ackerman, co-creator of *Vampirella*, poses with Talisa Soto who embodies the heroine in Showtime's movie. The couple pay homage to Warren Publishing's first (1969) issue. Vampirella's legacy was passed to Harris Comics, who resumed publication with issue # 113.



my head, I first suggested Miss Terry. You say it fast and you have Mystery. Warren said, 'Close, but no cigar,' which didn't matter because I don't smoke anyway."

Warren subsequently fired off a memo to Ackerman in March of 1969. *Forry, need your help on a new mag project, as follows: (1) Want to publish a new little, a la Creepy/Eerie, using the same type of horror-suspense-monster theme, only this time, instead of an Uncle Creepy/Coosin Eerie character, we'll be using a beautiful, mod, sexy, young witch-type gal as the character. (2) This gal will be the 'hottest' of the mag—and her name will be the title of the mag. (3) Would prefer a one-word title (name) that describes the contents of the mag and also serves as a good name for her. (4) All the stories will be oriented towards girls and women, and will feature the female slant. It will still be edited towards the same readership as Creepy/Eerie, and not to adults, even though the subject matter is girls. (a la Wonder Woman of the comics.) Please advise at once if interested, I'd like to have you aboard on this new title. Best, JW.*

Warren, himself, was something of an artist. A front cover of *Spacewreck* magazine, rendered by Basil Gogos, was embellished with publisher Warren's personalized insert of an alien. Naturally, Warren couldn't restrain himself from doodling his concept of his horror heroine within the historic memo. He envisioned her in a black, deeply-scooped evening gown with a high slit up the leg. Ackerman christened the sketches by attributing prospective names—Mary Mayhem, Sister Scary, Madrigal's Scary Tales—above the prototypes.

Sharing a Brazil-bound plane with genre luminaries (George Pui, Roman Polans-

FORREST J ACKERMAN

"We needed a name for our 'mod witch.' At the time, the film version of *Barbarella* was very big. And, all of a sudden, the name 'Vampirella' just popped, full-blown, into my mind."



Vampirella's debut, circa 1966. Publisher James Warren (left), doodled his initial concept of "a beautiful, young witch" (right) as a mascot.

ki, Robert Bloch), Ackerman finally baptized the unborn "witch-type gal" en route to a fantasy film festival. "It was midnight, and there was thunder and lightning. I was looking down at the Amazon River snaking along, when Warren's question occurred to me, again. 'What about that mod witch?' Well, at the time, the film version of the comic *Barbarella* was very big. And all of a sudden, the name Vampirella just popped, full-blown, into my mind.

"I began coming up with details about her. She'd be a brunette. I decided she'd come from a planet called Drakulon. Then I really had a unique idea; her planet would be one where the rivers and lakes are composed of blood. It wouldn't be from any creatures but, after all, blood does have some kind of chemical consistency and that would just happen to be how the planet was put together.

"I figured that the natives of such a planet would

n't eat anything. Whenever they felt the need to be replenished, they'd go down to the nearest river and simply drink their breakfast, lunch or dinner. I also pictured twin suns, which might eventually make the world so hot that the rivers and lakes of blood would dry up, which would be bad for the inhabitants.

Back in the States, Ackerman checked into New York for a conference with his publisher. "When I got there," recounts Ackerman, "Jim Warren had a list on his office wall with five or six names on it. At the bottom, we placed 'Vampirella'. And whoever came in and out all day, Warren would ask them which name they preferred. Well, everybody said, 'Vampirella!' That very evening, he took down the list, tore it up and said, 'Okay, you just named her!'"

The following day, Ackerman's personal intervention transformed Vampirella from hestia to an operative character in her own stories. Marching into Warren's of-

fice, he wrote an unsolicited story for the heroine. "I sat down at one of Jim's mechanical typewriters," recalls Ackerman. "I'd never written a comic in my life, but I looked at one and it seemed fairly simple. I wrote the origin story, which ran in *Vampirella* #1, in two hours."

It's a matter of record that Vampirella's physical manifestation was co-created by Ackerman, Warren and Frank Frazetta; the trademark costume was developed by comic artist Triana Robbins. Pointing the cover of *Vampirella* #1, Frazetta also contributed a number of pen and ink drawings. It's unlikely that Frazetta ever seriously considered illustrating Vampirella's origin story, what with his professed disenchantment with the diminishing emotional and financial returns of sequential comic storytelling. As a result, stalwart house artist Tom Sutton garnered the plum assignment.

According to Ackerman, Frank Frazetta was not Jim Warren's initial choice as the cover artist. "Warren had a French artist he'd discovered named Aslan. Eventually, he would paint pinups for *Oui*, a *Playboy* magazine. Warren was going to have him draw Vampirella. But the next thing I heard, Frazetta had heard about the character and broken down and cried, like a baby with a busted balloon, and asked to draw her. Warren pointed out to him that he, Frazetta, always kept his originals and that Jim had promised the original cover to 'Wampe' #1 to me. So Frazetta said, 'Alright, Forry can have her.' But, unfortunately, I never did come into possession of the painting. And a couple of years ago, it sold in a comic art auction at Sotheby's for, I believe, \$77,000.00."

Vampirella was a roaring success for Warren from the start. But low pay rates for submissions, along with related repercussions, limited

the volume of Ackerman's writing to only a handful of stories. He did, however, conceive the inside cover feature; dubbing it *Vampi's Fiery Tales*, he wrote several of the vignettes.

Utilizing his contacts in the film industry, Ackerman eventually collaborated with Warren to adapt *Vampirella* into a feature film. One prospect was boyhood chum James H. Nicholson, who terminated his American-International partnership with Sam Arkoff. Insistent on producing his own independent films, Nicholson mounted a fine adaptation of Richard Matheson's *Hell House* as his maiden effort. But the producer's abrupt demise sunk the fruition of a *Vampirella* vehicle.

Warren later tapped Hammer Films, the British exponent of bogeymen n' horrors, for a translation of *Vampirella* into a movie. "I understood at least five different scripts were written," relates Ackerman. "Still, Hammer wasn't satisfied. Finally somebody said, 'Wait a minute, what about Ackerman. Didn't he dream her up in the first place?' They turned the script they liked best over to me and I actually got paid for a dialogue polish on it. But I honestly felt the script was, plot-wise, unsalvageable. The best I was able to do was perk up the dialogue. However, it was obviously never made."

The current Showtime cable film, *VAMPIRELLA*, will commemorate Ackerman's 52nd on-screen cameo in 52 years. He pitched the producers with a concept for his latest abridged appearance. "I knew the story was to take place in Las Vegas. I thought I might be standing at a slot machine. *Vampirella* might come wandering by and I would ask her to pull the lever for luck. So she would pull the lever, and up straight across would come three bats and a ton of money. But the director felt it was too fantastical." He winks. □



The year, 1970, Publisher James Warren donated a gift to Vampi collaborator Forrest J Ackerman: one of artist Frank Frazetta's initial line drawings conceived for the slabs when Ackerman eagerly debbed as "Wes Tenny."



Business Leigh poses for the hard cover of Vampirella #75. The actress was pitched as Vampirella in a 1975 film adaptation but "It fell apart. I was too broken."

Having secured the rights, Wynorski turned to Gary Gerani, a Vampi aficionado, to write the screenplay. "Gary is a good, old pal of mine from New York," relates Wynorski. "He liked Vampirella and since he had co-written one script before [with Mark Carducci], I gave him a shot."

Gerani admits he "never really thought of Vampirella as a superheroine, a la Wonder Woman or whatever. But there is a piece of that in her history. The thing that Archie Goodwin tried to do in the old comics was to take the dynamics of superhero comic book plotting, and characterize them, and combine them with supernatural story elements. And then the science fiction material, which Forrest Ackerman

actually brought to it in the very first story, all dovetailed very, very nicely."

"Obviously, I have to admit I was immediately drawn to this incredible image of this beautiful woman in this exotic costume, that was the first thing that caught my eye. But once I got into it, I really began to appreciate all the other aspects of the concept. As a screenwriter, it was my job to play with all those ideas and combine them in such a way where, as fantastic as these concepts are, somehow it has to play. You had to believe those people and somehow it all has to tie-in together. In my view, any movie that has both Count Dracula and rocketships in it is worth a look."

The screenwriter is a fan

JIM WYNORSKI, DIRECTOR

"I didn't have any fun shooting this movie. I hated everybody in Las Vegas. What attracted me to it was the idea of making a lot of money and working with a couple of sexy babes."

of not only H.P. Lovecraft but British author Nigel Kneale; significantly, both ascribes combined mysticism and the supernatural with science. More recently, Fox-TV's X FILES has turned this merger into a trend that competitive networks are eager to imitate.

What we don't know about Vampirella qualifies her as a sexy enigma. Her comic book origins define the character as an Amazonian vampire whose race has suffered extinction. Beyond Vampa's exotic appeal, Gerani is probing for her humanity. "We just wanted to give her a few tantalizing details about her back story, but never really filling it in. We wanted to keep that a mystery. I had to give her a motivation and a set-up which, in the comic, took a while to slowly but surely emerge. I set her up on her native world. Her stepfather [Angus Scrimm], who is the High Elder of Drakulon, is killed in this very brutal attack. In fact, all of the High Elders are massacred in the film's prologue. Of course, Vampirella wants to track down the assassins."

The film raises questions about whether Vampirella's quest is justice or vengeance. Her late guardian ethically disciplined Vampi with principles of progressive philosophy. Nevertheless, her background is shaded with hints of a malevolent kinship. Vampi occupied the same locality of Drakulon as Vlad Tepes (Roger Daltrey), who cruised to Earth as Count Dracula, there's a possibility the couple may be related. In the aftermath of the massacre, Vampi rejects the civilized training of her race and surrenders to her primal psycho. She boards a space-

ship in pursuit of Tepes and his blood relations.

The film also deals with prejudice, Vampi demonstrates to Adam Van Helsing that PURGE's anti-vampire operatives were often persecuting people who could not help themselves. She disproves a popular edict that the only "good" vampire is a dead vampire.

"She, herself, is not quite sure if she is part of the dark side, or the light side," explains Gerani. "She is always wrestling with that, plus the fact that she's a vampire and now on Earth. The rules are very, very different, so she has to control that side of herself. We have a very physical thing that shows she's torn between being a good person and a monster. Internally, there's always that little war too. She's not quite sure what she is."

"The story essentially has her learning and defining the person she is in the course of the adventure. But I kept things pretty open-ended, so if there are future

VAMPIRELLA screenwriter Gary Gerani took-up the Sun Gun. "It shoots artificial sunlight to kill vampires."



versions of this incarnation of Vampirella, we would go back and there'd be different theories as to where she came from—and how she might have been different from her fellow Drakulonians."

The comic book offered several options for Vamp's origins, including a light-hearted one from Forrest Ackerman, which includes a sister Drakulina. When Archie Goodwin took over, he suggested that Vampirella had a lover on Drakulon, but it was fairly sketchy. Torn between compassion and savagery, she turns to the latter when physically challenged by zombies to werewolves.

Exempting BATMAN and SUPERMAN, translations of comic books to TV and films have routinely floundered in the Nielsen's or died at the boxoffice. "The trouble is they suck," rationalizes Wynorski. Comic book avengers—The Rocketeer, Doc Savage, The Shadow—have simply failed to captivate audiences. Something that sustained their longevity in print is lost in the transition to film. This has been especially true of female superheroes, what with the commercial failures of SHERA, TANK GIRL, SUPERGIRL and BARB WIRE. The major success in this distaff field has been BARBARELLA, adapted from Jean-Claude Florez's "risque comic strip," Jane Fonda, who portrayed a naive waif from the future, would likely prefer to forget this sampling of "adolescent voyeurism." (The WONDER WOMAN TV series was only a moderate success. According to rumor, the show stretched to three seasons because the head of CBS loved the way Lynda Carter looked in her strapless costume).



Sole incarnation Vamp's predatory alter ego, courtesy of Wendy Robin's special effects. "Robin really went to town in those scenes," recalls the screenwriter. "She was really scary."

Gerani describes VAMPIRELLA as a "dark fairy tale. Like all fairy tales, the female character adventurously dominates the story and goes through a 'rites of passage' growth process. Interestingly enough, there are certain things—which I was not even aware of while I was writing it—that adhere to the fairy tale structure. Vampirella was partially inspired by Barbarella, which was inspired by Cinderella. Indirectly, you have a little bit of Cinderella as well because by midnight, if she hasn't drained Adam Van Helsing of blood, she'll die because they have taken her serum of blood substitute away."

Vlad Tepes is portrayed as a super serial killer who

has regressed to genocide for survival, instead of drinking blood from the organic streams of Drakulon, he drains his fellow Drakulonians. This spin on the Dracula legend posits that, once ago, the Count concluded a 10th interplanetary travel by landing on Earth. His bloodthirst is driven by the prevailing strain of vampirism from his home planet, his hites are infectious, and he can no longer endure daylight. Vampirella does not arrive on Earth until centuries later, conditions have environmentally changed, and she's developed an immunity to sunlight.

Before settling on the final script, Gerani had played with a couple of different approaches. One in-

cluded portraying Vampirella and Vlad Tepes as scientists and lovers on Drakulon, seduced by the dark side of technology. Tepes indulges in evil experimentation.

According to Wynorski, when Gerani turned in his first draft of the screenplay, he [Wynorski] "hated it because [Gerani] didn't write what I told him to write. Then he wrote what I did want him to write, and he wrote a good script. I don't remember what [that first script was], but it stunk on ice. Then he brought me a \$40 million script, let's be honest." It was the latter script that eventually had to be homogenized into a \$1 million Showtime production. Compliant with the more constrictive budget, all of the script's more elaborate aspicies—including lavish 8x scenes—had to be scaled down. Gerani notes that, because television films usually have to be done very quickly, producers rarely meddle with the script. Ironically, a more opulently produced movie is a liability for a screenwriter, producers are afforded a surfeit of writers who sometimes rewrite the original vision to destruction.

"Jim and I had discussed a variation of the final version of this thing," Gerani recalls, "and then I went off in another direction, just kind of the way a writer will—'Oh, I have this great idea!'—and Jim was horrified, saying, 'No! No! This isn't what we spoke about.' I thought, 'Oh no, here I thought I had come up with something else that was even better and I almost wound up losing the job. Oh, what a knucklehead.' So I spent that entire afternoon really kind of brring through this version of the story, re-

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VAMPIRELLA

COMICS COMEBACK

THOUGH DEBTS CUT THE SEX KITTEN'S LIFELINE, HARRIS COMICS RESURRECTED HER AS AN AVENGING "BAD GIRL."

BY SEAN FERNALD

She debated on newsstands in 1969 and spent the next 14 years triumphing over a hellish bedlam of cutthroats. It wasn't until 1983 that Vampirella finally met her match: bills, bills, bills.

Financial debts and poor circulation vanquished Vampi and toppled her benefactor, the Warren Publishing empire. Cutting losses, company president James Warren sold *Vampirella* to Harris Publications, one of the nation's largest "special interest" publishers. The sale also accrued rights to Warren's other illustrated magazines, *Creepy*, *Berie*, 1994 and *The Book*. Five years later, Harris finally picked up where Warren left off, resuming publication of *Vampirella* with issue #113. But lackluster sales prompted cancellation, triggering a prescribed ritual in the returnable magazine business, all copies were destroyed.

Three years later (1991), Harris Publications developed a division solely devoted to comic books, the resultant Harris Comics was launched with *Vampirella* Vs. *The Cult of Chaos*, a trade paperback recounting the first serious stories published by Warren during the 1970s. The success of this volume influenced another retrospective, *Creepy: The Classic Years*. Harris Comics debuted "all-new" material in a couple of 4-issue miniseries, each penned in black and white. *Vampirella, Coming In America*, scripted by Kurt Busiek, and *Creepy*, written by Peter David and Jo Duffy. One year later, Harris released *Vampirella: Transcending Time and Space*, its second collection of Warren-related vignettes, and *Vampirella's Summer Nights*, the final black and white book of all-new adventures.



Harris Comics' *Vampirella*. Classic Gallery was illustrated with Jose Gonzalez art of our heroine. Will this vision of Vampi eventually be embodied by a screen actress?

Profiting only from nostalgic comic buyers, the magazines failed to attract a more mainstream, youthful audience. To gratify a new generation of readers, Harris printed their *Creepy* 1993 Fearbook in full-color, the highlight was the first hued *Vampirella* adventure applied to a traditional comic book format. The book induced publication of the new landmark *Vampirella* #1, Adam Hughes' sexy cover painting was complimented by opulent interior art, rendered by Louis Small, Jr. and Jim Balent. The resurrection of Vampi clicked with the public; first and second printings of the issue were instant sell-outs across the

country. Harris Comics had arrived.

The early issues reintroduced familiar characters, though certain modifications updated the series. Example: Vampi's love, Adam Van Helsing, was appointed senator to scorbate his family's war against bloodsuckers. The first five issues chronicled our heroine's struggle with her old flame/foe, Count Dracula, who's plotting world annihilation via an undead militia. The premise renewed Vampi's ties with supernatural agents, which had originated in the '70s. The book's success hastened Harris's expansion with two additional titles, *Caus* and *Q West*. But missed publication deadlines, which stretched up to eight months in one case, provoked "bad blood" among retailers. The consequence: a cancellation of all Harris titles. *Vampirella* would only be resurrected if the publishers adhered to a punctual, monthly commitment.

April, 1994 Harris Comics published *Vengeance of Vampirella* #1. A red foil cover, by Joe Quinada and Jimmy Palmiotti, decried the competition. Tom Siegelowski handled the storytelling, and newcomer Buxx furnished the resplendent art. The issue tallied enough sales to qualify as nothing less than a "mega-hit." *Vampirella* offered more than a revamped creative unit; it reinterpreted Vampi as more of a superhero, and less the babe/victim stereotype which plagued her Warren years. This new title also dispatched Vampi on a year-long "mystery-suit," which revealed that the Warren-era adventures were false memories implanted by her evil "brother and sister"—both offspring of the biblical Lilitu! *Vampirella* was "born" to fight her evil siblings, and redeem her mother in the eyes of God.

Last year, Harris added two bi-



monthly titles: *Vampirella Classic* (now *Vampirella of Drakulon*), featuring Warren-era illustrated stories translated into computer colors, and *Vampirella Strikes*, issue #1 of the latter book prefaced its fresh adventures with four different photo covers of the Vampi model.

Issues #23-25 of *Vengeance of Vampirella* ushered in a new season, Mistress Nyx, who's prominent among the past summer's storylines. But *WV* #25 is the concluding issue of the series, the subsequent edition will be a series of 3-issue storylines constructed, per are, by a new, revitalized team. These trilogies will move *Vampirella* toward a more horrific and supernatural realm, coming full-circle to Warren Publishing's early vision.

Vampirella's continued success has replicated an army of imitators and would-be heirs to her throne. But plasticity—in i.e. cleavage—is a pale, expedient contrivance. Character secures longevity and, indisputably, *Vampirella*'s complexity has fueled her rep as the reigning 'bad girl' of comics. Harris is currently celebrating 25 years of *Vampi* takes...here's to not only another 25 years, but a new millennium—and beyond. □

Left: Model Sarah Knoop as the Vampi heroine. Below: Adam Hughes' rendering of the delicious Vampirella guzzling a Vampi compendium.



fining it, and basically coming up with the best version of VAMPIRELLA I've ever come up with. I had done three or four different takes but this last one, which I came up with almost on the spur of the moment, really did seem to hit the nail on the head."

Originally, Gerani applied a "rock star" touch to his scenario, but acclimated it to the tongue-in-cheek spirit of CAST A DEADLY SPELL, a film noir spoof about private dick H.P. Lovecraft, who sleuths in a world where demons and sorcery are simply part of everyday existence. Unlike the final shooting script of VAMPIRELLA, the Jamie Blood character wasn't a camouflage for Dracula but simply a musician exploiting his music to open up another dimension and facilitate the earthly invasion of Cthulhu-inspired monstrosities. The premise was influenced by the original comic's Cult of Chaos. Gerani realizes that his first approach was a little too flip, a little too lighthearted. Concurring with Wynorski, the writer agreed that Dracula should be the bad guy, and that the film should try to redefine the Hollywood clichés about vampires.

Gerani's approach was to avoid making the film a straight comedy or a dry-humored smirk, instead, he opted to embrace fantasy and adventure, wholeheartedly. Uncertain if the film would be lavishly or modestly produced, Gerani claims to have written the script "both ways, which was an interesting thing to do. I spoke to Jim [Wynorski] about it and told him I didn't want to hold back anything in terms of special effects: 'On the one hand, I'll give you a script which has all these wonderful settings, and all this exciting



She posed in the more revealing Vampire costume only for a p.r. shoot. The writer describes the altered logo (facing page, top) as "a variation, with a couple of extra straps to keep it in."

stuff, in case a major director wants to do this as a big budgeted film. On the other hand, if we do have to scale this down as either a low budget film or a TV pilot, I'll write it in such a way where that stuff can be refigured in a much less ambitious way—we can still maintain the exact structure, all the characters, all the themes.' And that's exactly how it worked."

Wynorski sighs that Gerani had originally "written the script too expensive. He was not aware, when I kept saying, 'You have to cut it down in size,' what that really meant. But now he knows because he was there every day, and he saw the difficulties of just getting through a day with get-

ting the story.

"The main thing is to get the story. You get the flourishes later. Make sure you have a story by the time you leave the location."

Gerani reports that, at one point, Tim Burton was interested in adapting Vampirella into an expensive theatrical feature. When Wynorski purchased the property a few years ago, he claimed he simply wanted to make big bucks by producing it as a vehicle for an A-list star. Cher was in the running. But Gerani insists that Wynorski wanted to direct all along ("I think he had the time of his life with it").

Wynorski, however, recounts the experience with slight contrariness: "I didn't have any fun shooting this

movie. No fun. I hated everybody in Las Vegas. I just hated everybody."

Come to think of it, admits Gerani, some of those Las Vegas locations "were pretty rough. We were out miles and miles out into the desert, all the way out in the middle of nowhere." The exterior shots recorded Vampirella's Mars exploration; it's sort of her rest stop en route to Earth. "It was windy as hell up there," continues Gerani. "It was miserable, but—Man!—it looked great. All this colored light, and swirling smoke behind the cave, and the astronauts...but, again, you had to suffer in the location. You want something more exotic, you have to put up with the elements."

The film also shot in old Vegas, a former tourist attraction-turned-ghost town. A pretty ideal setting for Vind Tepee's cult. "That was hot as hell," exhales Gerani, "the sun just beating down on you." The production also shot at Hoover Dam, utilizing the generator rooms because they look like sets from a science fiction movie.

Most of the film was shot in night shifts, starting 6:00 to 6:30 in the evening and lingering on until 6:30 in the morning.

One of Wynorski's biggest difficulties was dealing with the local unions. "They made us work with incompetent people," he unflinchingly asserts with his trademark condescension. "Many of the Las Vegas location people were price gougers. They'd quote one price, you got there, and they asked for more because you're there and you can't do anything about it."

It had been reported that Ms. Soto had injured a stunt man during the course of

GARY GERANI, SCREENWRITER

"Talisa Soto is terrific! I was concerned that, because Vampirella is a beauty whose charms are always on display, there'd be a temptation to cast the latest BAYWATCH babe."

production. Wynorski—making a macabre reference to the fatal shooting of Brandon Lee on *THE CROW* set—jokes, "She shot someone and mortally wounded him during the course of the picture, but we're trying to cover it up [Pauses] I'm just talking. She did not break the man's nose. She bit a stunt man in the nose, and drew a little blood. That was the extent of it. The guy was a stunt man and he knew the risks involved, and he got a bloody nose. That happens occasionally."

"These things happen," snarles Gerani. "Talisa was very upset about it. I have this bit of business where one of the lesser vampire gangsters is being tortured by Demos, one of Vlad's 'Unholy Three,' and we have this cross that's upside down with this 'bad guy vampire' crucified on it. It was a scary bit of business filming it, because that damned thing had to be rigged right. I'm thinking, if someone got seriously hurt, I couldn't live with myself again... The idea of someone getting killed for this stuff!"

Gerani was often on the set and has a pair of cameo roles in the film, playing one of twelve vampire mafia chieftains and, clad as a cowed monk, a foot soldier for Vlad Tepes. Gerani's acting aptitude? "He's fair," assesses Wynorski. "Neither be nor I will be embarrassed. He's not the worst actor in the film. The worst actor was cut. It was always good to have Gary around, I'm telling you. The whole thing held together pretty well."

That feeling is mutual. "I think ultimately Jim was very pleased having me there," says Gerani, "because I didn't get in his way.

On a number of occasions, he asked for my opinion and assistance. I was very, very happy to give him that. As a matter of fact, there's a point where he was saying, 'Gerani, get over here. What the hell did you have in mind on this thing?' It's interesting, but I don't quite understand—

"I was really happy to be there to focus in on some of these things for him when-ever he asked for help. I figured I'd just be out there for the first week or so but, after the first week, I just became addicted to it...It was too much of a kick for me."

The filmmakers credit Talisa Soto for subverting the gamble of turning Vampirella into another *Barbarella*. Though undeniably beguiling, Soto's performance isn't heretofore self-esteem. The illustrated Vampirella was rendered as a libertine, though she fought monsters and delivered roundhouse rights that could coldcock any opponent, artist Jose Gonzalez' casually painted a compassionate face on the heroine. She's a bona fide femme fatale, her flawless beauty notwithstanding. Vampi may impulsively transform



Soto resists the flirtations of Forest J. Ackerman's "Mark" ("I'm just belly over that costume!") The director cut the scene because "it was ending up lame."

into a bloodlusting vampire. Nevertheless, an acquaintanceship with the slightly schizophrenic siren seemed well worth the risk. Talisa Soto resisted the opportunity of reducing Vampi to vanity, she delivered not only the sex appeal, but an emotional ambiguity to her character.

Wynorski, who quipped about considering Nancy Kulp (*Mrs. Hathaway* on *THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES*) for the role, described Soto as "an actress who always brought a certain thing to the role. She'd say her character wouldn't do this or say this. I would say 99% of the time, she was right. It helped me, it helped the show. She was very good about noticing when things were wrong

and when things didn't play, as was Roger Daltrey."

Gerani extols Soto as "terrific. One of the main things with *VAMPIRELLA* that always concerned me, since she's so beautiful and her charms are always on display, was the temptation to cast the latest *BAYWATCH* babe in the role. I'm thinking, 'God, that would immediately pull the rug out from under it, it'll just be a cheesy movie.' So I was really delighted with Talisa Soto because Talisa has so much dignity in her face and in her style of delivery. I believe that really helped.

"Also, she's very exotic. At one point Lt. Walsh—the person who operates *PURGE* along with Adam Van Halen—addresses her with, 'So, Adam tells me you're an E.T.' She just says, straight-faced, 'That's right.' When Talisa says it, she still has traces of her Puerto Rican accent which adds flavoring to her style of delivery. Whatever it is, it adds up to the feeling that this woman is a little exotic, she is a little alien, she's a little different. I was so grateful they cast someone who had those qualities, rather than the latest pretty girl who'd look great in a revealing suit but lack credibility as

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Soto as a native of planet Orkushia in *VAMPIRELLA*'s prologue. Trained in progressive philosophy, she turns bloodlusty when her stepfather is murdered.



VAMPIRELLA

COSTUME DESIGN

THE THREAT OF "FALL-OUT" PROMPTED COMPROMISE ON THE BREVITY OF VAMPI'S TRADEMARK OUTFIT.

By MARK PATRICK CARDUCCI

Arguably, no aspect of a comic book's translation to film engenders more controversy than the superhero's threads. To a large extent, comic book characters are their costumes; thus, a movie's lack of fidelity to its printed precursor's frock can be a bone of contention. Remember the flock generated by the refurbished (1974) Wonder Woman costume tailored—sans cleavage—for Cathy Lee Crosby? The evolution of VAMPIRELLA's garment is a consequence of compromise between its director, star and magazine source.

Among the more enviable assignments delegated by the producers of VAMPIRELLA was an opportunity to fashion Vampi's trademark costume. But it was similarly incumbent upon Roxanne Miller, the film's wardrobe designer, to tailor outfits for PURGE (an organization of vampire hunters) and Vlad, the vampire cult leader. Miller, who moonlights as an actress, recalls her abrupt recruitment: "I knew a producer over at Fall Moon Studios named Pat Scifano. He made an introduction to director/producer Jim Wynorski for me. When Jim and I first met, he mentioned something about hoping to shoot VAMPIRELLA, but nothing specific. I left my card and, to my surprise, he called me not very long afterwards. I showed up at his office on Sunset Boulevard, assuming it was just an interview for the job. But, upon my arrival, I realized that I was in the middle of a full production meeting with all these people. Jim throws me a script and tells me to sit down. We hadn't even discussed money yet."

The versatile Miller served as a field reporter for "THE INVESTMENT



Roxanne Miller, occasional actress and VAMPIRELLA's wardrobe designer: "I admire Vampi. She's an assertive woman who has struggled with her dark side and sex."

CONNECTION, a TV show that ran for 26 weeks in San Francisco." As a thespian, Miller is no stranger to action heroines: "I was cast as a Jersey biker girl in a film called CRISPY, CRACKERS AND BEANS. Ironically, VAMPIRELLA is my second close encounter with a female extraterrestrial; the first was Surrender Cinema's FEMALIEN—I played a massage attendant. Personally, I like combining my professions as actress and wardrobe designer—I mean, who could wardrobe me better than myself?" Miller's beauty has occasionally proved to be a liability. "As an attractive woman, I had to constantly prove myself as a serious actress. I've

declined the things you have to do to get in front of the camera—specifically nudity. I prefer wearing the wardrobe that I select, rather than letting it drift to the floor."

Until her introduction to Wynorski, Miller admits she was completely unaware of Vampirella. "But a girlfriend of mine was a huge fan," declares Miller. "She was like, 'Oh, this great superhero vampire!' The first time I saw what the character looked like was when I went to Jim Wynorski's suite at the American Film Market. He had this life-sized cut-out poster of her. I thought, 'Very revealing costume—and very sexy.' But while it looked great on paper, I assumed its flimsiness may communicate more 'Jessica Rabbit' than an aggressive heroine."

Beyond the sartorial splendor of Vampirella's togs, Miller was obligated to design uniforms for the aforementioned PURGE militia. "Basically I wanted them to be kind of hip and slick, but still soldiers, a combination of something from James Bond and THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. I had to design several different types of uniforms for PURGE, since some went out in the field to fight, some worked in the headquarters and some were techies. But a common thread through them all were black, baseball-style hats with gold crosses on them. I saw them mostly dressed in black. I went through a number of different ideas, before settling on the right one. At first, I thought I'd have them wearing one-piece jumpsuits. But I spoke to the prop master and he said that he needed some kind of vest, because PURGE operatives had to carry lots of things with them, like the stake bullets for their stake guns. They needed pockets. But I didn't want the typical SWAT vests we've seen before. I wanted leather vests. I had these



7) The approved outfit. 8) "I stuck to the comic costume [for right-hemmer]," says Roxanne Miller. "But to avoid slippage in fight scenes, Soto wanted a bra [9]"

cool leather vests made that were copies of a fishing jacket I'd found. Then I decided to have them wear turtle-necks, like in one of the Bond films. And black parachute pants, also with lots of pockets. Oh, and I came across a real bonus while I was doing my wild frenzied shopping for materials. I knew I wanted cross emblems for the hats. But I also found these metal crosses that were also whistles! PURGE could wear them around their necks

They were perfect. Unfortunately, since they weren't in the script, I don't think there's a scene where anyone actually blows one."

Gory Gerani's teleplay for VAMPIRELLA delivers a sassy means by which vampires could mobilize outdoors during daylight, mockingly dubbed "sunsuits" by PURGE; they're composed of an unknown fabric that resists the sun's lethal rays. Director Jim Wynorski preferred a visual stylization that replicated the pulpy

ROXANNE MILLER, WARDROBE
"As soon as we saw it on Talisa Soto, it became apparent the costume wasn't one she could move around in. As Vampirella, she couldn't be worried about her suit falling off."

concept of Mario Bava's PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES. "As reference for designing the sunsuits, Jim had given me a videotape of the Bava film," says Miller. "Throughout that film the characters are wearing these tight black astronaut suits, made of shiny black vinyl. So I made something like them, and also designed hoods to go with them. Then I found these very cool sunglasses,

lematic since Daltrey's absence denied Miller access to his vital statistics. "Before shooting, I was only able to speak with Roger Daltrey by phone," says Miller with a shudder. "He gave me all his measurements and I was just hoping that he was telling me the truth, because sometimes people have a tendency not to."

"I knew I wanted his outfits to be wild, but still have



kind of high-tech, reflective and very very skinny. The sunsuits were very tight, not very comfortable. And, of course, shooting in Las Vegas, they became less like sunsuits and more like sauna suits." But they looked great."

Roger Daltrey, lead singer of The Who, portrays Vlad, Vampirella's Drakuloesian nemesis. While plotting a vampiric conquest of Earth, Vlad masquerades as rock star Jamie Blood. But outfitting Vlad/Jamie proved prob-

some class about them. Roger was comfortable with my ideas. I was glad he's a rock star in actual life, so I could easily research what he looked like in rock 'n' roll regalia. It was a bit of a handicap that I didn't get to actually fit him personally, until he showed up in Las Vegas, you're never sure the clothing is going to fit well and look as good as it can look. But Roger was very happy with what I came up with.

And then there was Talisa Soto's costume, unques-

tionably the movie's visual signature. Even before film was threaded into the movie cameras, Miller—already burdened with constructive deadlines—had to construct a Vampi costume for a last-minute photo shoot. Wynorski was scheduled to pitch *VAMPIRELLA* at the Cannes Film Festival and a poster of Soto, clad in the classic, very abbreviated costume, would likely draw buyers. Miller recounts that Wynorski wanted a rigid adherence to Vampi's spaghetti-strap attire. But, in the end, reality intervened.

"From the very beginning, Jim was very influenced by the comic book," recalls Miller. "He had given me a lot of the comic images to work from. The first costume, the one for the pre-production Cannes photo shoots, had to be made so quickly. I was hired to work on the movie and the next day I got a call asking if, in two days time, I could put together a costume for this publicity shoot. The lack of time was pretty scary."

"They gave me Talisa's number and I got her measurements. But, as with Roger Daltrey, I wasn't able to meet with her in person until the costume was ready. I had to spend all my time with the pattern maker, sewing and putting it together. I finished it and brought it over to the photo shoot. And it fit Talisa really well. It looked fantastic, too."

"But as soon as we all saw it on Talisa, it became apparent that it wasn't really a costume you could move around in. It's a great costume if you stand still or you're lying in the sun—or if you're a comic book character. It's kind of mysteriously glued to your body. But it had a tendency to slip and slide and, because of the design, there wasn't much you could do about it. The nature of the original design was that it moves if you move. And *Vampirella* was going to have to move a lot."

"We knew there were going to be a lot of action scenes, where Talisa was going to be kicking and jumping and

ROXANNE MILLER, WARDROBE

"The costume designed in pre-production looked great if Talisa, as Vampi, only had to sunbathe. But it slid down when she moved, and there were plenty of action scenes."



T. Soto models Roxanne Miller's "sift" tags, the Vampi outfit was later altered into a conservative "fighting suit." R. Miller designed attire for Vampi's generals: Yori Gato (T. Soto), Corinne Harvey (T. Soto) and Dean Cain (T. Soto).



punching. And every time she did, the costume was going to be somewhere else on her body. We had to figure something out. Jim was in on these discussions, and really wanted us to maintain as much of the original design as possible. But we did have to refine it. For one thing, we needed to add straps, to enable the suit to be geared for action. What we finally did for the costume Talisa wears in the film was to construct the suit to Talisa's body. And it needed a lot of support straps, in the back and over the shoulders. The costume kept its integrity, in terms of faithfulness to the comic, through the white collar, the ring, and the bikini bottom with the last insignia. So now we had a fighting suit, a suit Talisa could really move around in."

"The 'reality factor' played a recurrent role part in the design of *Vampirella*'s high-heeled boots. "There again," Miller remembers, "for the photo shoot I had almost the exact boot: almost a fetishy high heel. But it was impossible for Talisa to walk from the dressing room to where they were taking the pictures. The boots looked hot but she couldn't run in them. So again, we designed a variation, something with a square heel, more wide-toed, so Talisa could do the athletics comfortably."

Miller's original costume, which personified Vampi's freedom from shame, no longer exists; it was cannibalized and refashioned as Soto's movie vestment. "We chopped it up," acknowledges Miller. "I did take pictures of it beforehand. It was such a comedy. We created the film's suit in Las Vegas for the Cannes shoot, then ripped it apart—cutting here and cutting there—and fitted it to Talisa. It was basically sewn on her body, to ensure she could move and fight in it. And when we were done, we had a fuller costume that gave Talisa that 'superhero confidence.' As a superhero, you can't be worried about your suit falling off, can you?" □

an actress."

Soto insisted on costume alterations for more flexibility in action scenes; the initial, more faithful replication of Vampi's tegs slid from Soto's physique whenever she moved beyond a stationary position. Gerani offers this personal disclaimer: "I want to caution the Vampirella fans of the world who are absolutely in love with that costume. I know it's going to be heart-breaking that it's not exactly what they wanted. But I feel it does capture the feel of the original costume. Talisa originally did wear a version of the costume that looked exactly the way it was illustrated in the comic. But it just wasn't working. That's a great costume if you are modeling, or if you are giving autographs at a convention. However, if you have to do anything physical to any degree—like running or fighting—it just didn't stay on. In terms of the practical reality of making a movie, it just would not play."

"But we did try...all of us, including Talisa. When I realized we weren't going to have the original, I was really disappointed. But then, when I so completely bought Talisa playing that role, I never thought twice about it. I think if you enjoy the film, and you enjoy her, you'll have no problem with the costume. It's a variation of the one we know and love, with just a couple of extra straps to keep it in place. In retrospect, the original costume probably would have, to some degree, undermined her dignity a little too, because it was—for all of us horny fans—exactly what we wanted."

Nudity is a commercial requisite for a Wynorski film, though even early drafts of the script never separated Vampirella from her costume: "I couldn't get a big star to do nudity, but you can get a big star to be sexy," explains the randy director. "Of course, we've got Corinna Harney, 1992 Playmate of the Year. She pops



Soto's Vampi bares her claws. "Like, herself, is not quite sure if she's part of the light or dark side," explains the screenwriter. "Vampi's always wrestling with it—born between being a good person and a monster. Internally, there's a war."

the top, absolutely."

Harney plays Sallah, one of Vlad Tepes' unholy trio of generals who abet his escape from the Drakulon tribunal. "She's a great character because she fits Roger Daltrey, perfectly," reports Gerani. "You really believe that they are lovers. They just work out beautifully. She's very petite, and actually has a high little girl voice. I have to admit that when I wrote Sallah, that

wasn't what I had in mind. But once Corinna was cast, I saw what she was bringing to it and I actually found that very, very charming. She has the quality of a kind of nasty, little girl. Her diminutive size and high voice is in perfect contrast to Vampirella, who is very tall and usually speaks in a low kind of a voice. Corinna played Sallah as spiteful and perverse, the main squeeze of the greatest vam-

pire who ever lived in history. There's a nice chemistry between them, and they were a delight to work with."

Wynorski relates that Roger Daltrey, who's acting credits include TOMMY, LISZTOMANIA, and a TALES FROM THE CRYPT episode, "Really wanted to do the film to honor Keith Moon's memory. Roger knew about the character because Moon, the late

drummer of the Who, used to be a big fan of Vampirella.

"We really lucked out in getting Roger Daltrey," says Gerani. "In the story, Dracula has been around forever in various incarnations; he was a Roman, the Black Knight, and a Nazi general. And now, he's incarnated as a rock star named Jamie Blood and this role allowed us to cast a rock star. Little did I realize that we'd be getting not only a rock star, but also a legend. Daltrey also composed a song for us, *Bleed for Me*, so if nothing else, we've got an incredible new song and a showcase for it; if everything else falls flat, at least we will have that. I keep telling my friends that was really cool and unexpected. I remember someone saying, 'Roger Daltrey is looking for you,' and he grabbed me into his trailer and said, 'Listen to the lyrics, listen to the song.' Hey, cool!"

"Also, Roger is really excellent as an actor. The Lord of the Vampires is a very flamboyant role; you're not only playing Dracula, you're playing Dracula who comes from another planet. It's very, very outrageous. He recites his dialogue with an almost Shakespearean-style of reading. It grossly en-

Roger Daltrey as Dracula/Vlad Tepes, an aristocratic "soul killer" who robs Earth with his vampire plague.



BARBARA LEIGH, EX-VAMPIRELLA

"I was going to play Vampi in a Hammer film, but it fell apart. I have mixed emotions about the new movie. I understand they changed her costume and, to me, Vampi is her costume."



Workouts of Vlad Tepes, Vampi's nemesis, are played by Wyndolite veterans Peggy Terrelli (FF 442) and Anthony Durkin (JANUARY 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100, 2101, 2102, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2120, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2128, 2129, 2130, 2131, 2132, 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those bonds—was also very key to that dark side of the character. It's like you are in the middle of this incredible bloodlust but, again, she came after Vlad because Vlad is of that evil ilk. She's not that way. She can't be that way or she'd be the same as he is. Meanwhile, he's trying to get her to join him. It was really exciting watching Talisa do all the stuff. She really let her blood boil for those scenes."

Gerani paid tribute to Vampirella's creator by naming one of the characters "Ferry Ackerman." Originally, the character was called "Warren Ackerman" as a joint commemorative salute to Vampi publisher James Warren as well, however, Wynorski thought it would be "cooler" to christen the character as *Ferry Ackerman*, allowing for a scene where "Ferry" is introduced to Vampirella as an in-joke. The character, a computer nerd, shares the authentic Ackerman's penchant for accumulating sci-fi collectibles, thus, his apartment is inundated with memorabilia, including Ackerman's beloved Robotrix from METROPOLIS. He provides Vampirella with data related to the earthly guises of her nemesis.

Ferry Ackerman appeared in a cameo role that wound-up on the cutting room floor. One scripted scene, set in a nightclub, introduced Vampirella to "The Hunk," a cross between a distinguished gentleman and a maitre d', he tries to put the make on her but she blows him off and moves along. Cost as the flirtatious character, Ackerman predictably drops a bad pun. "I'm just batty over that costume," he quips. "Can I do something for you my dear?"



"There had to be one scene where Vampirella was shined-up," notes the screenwriter. "It's your traditional pulp bondage bit, but it was so key to her dark side." Inset: Director Joe Wynorski

"Unfortunately, I had to cut Ferry's cameo out," says Wynorski. "He's still in the film, but just briefly. It was boring and it was eating up time I needed for the rest of the picture. You can still see him clapping his hands and having a good time, but he does not say anything."

"There was a whole long sequence where Vampirella entered a club, and it was just so, so boring that I just came to the point where we go right to the song. It really helped the film to move along. My goal is not to show Ferry Ackerman, but to show a movie. I did promise him a cameo, and you do see him—I definitely

put him in, because it's in his contract that I put him in the film."

Wynorski is unphased by rumors suggesting Roger Corman and Showtime weren't happy with the film's dailies. "They always hate the dailies," he says nonchalantly. "They're always going, 'Why isn't it this? Why isn't it that?'" Who has the time to look at dailies? I hate them. After I've shot a film, the next time I want to see dailies is when I'm putting them together.

"The lab tells me they're in focus, and the editorial assistant tells me they were all printed correctly. When I hear those two things—that

everything I asked to be printed was printed, and everything that I've printed was in focus—then I know what I've shot and can edit the movie. You're going to be very happy with some of the wild stuff I did. Very happy."

Mark Carducci was a friend to the production, assisting on the script and recommending special effects craftsmen to Wynorski. He also assisted in the preparation for this article.

Gerani remains a part-time screenwriter who toils full-time for Topps Trading Cards; he supplements his art direction and editorial work by writing for comic books. He partnered with the aforementioned Mark Carducci on PUMPKIN-HEAD, the duo were also involved on a couple of other projects which didn't pan-out. Gerani has completed another script on spec and currently has something cooking at HBO.

Wynorski continues to grind out genre exploitation fare. He insists he hates interviews and hates *Femmes Fatales*. "They wouldn't print my article correctly," he gripes, "It was an article I wrote under an assumed name. I love Bill George, the editor, but he butchered the article. Put down that I hate Steve Biedrowski as well."

Dracula, rockets, fangs and mammaries. VAMPIRELLA bolies its "dark fairy tale" surface to pseudo-scientifically postulate how the scourge of vampirism reached the Earth. The film wholeheartedly accepts Arthur C. Clarke's dictum that someone else's higher technology is indistinguishable from magic. And it's all tied together by one of the most fetching fantasy females ever to penetrate the public consciousness. □

BL

FROM BLACK

DOUGLAS EBY

While Joan Severance squeezes into her superheroine duds, Jonathan Winfrey notes the actress will also be slipping into "a personality change; she becomes a stronger character, but it also gives her super powers. But the character who really makes a transformation in **BLACK SCORPION 2** is Professor Ursula Underhuff, who becomes Aftershock; she's a meek little scientist,

L. Severance is the sage designed for her initial installment of **THE BLACK SCORPION**. Dressed to kill in the sequel, with a retitled costume



BLACK SCORPION 2

WIDOW TO NIGHT CRAWLER: A CHAT WITH JOAN SEVERANCE.

this nice person who's trying to be accepted by society, who's been wronged and becomes a powerful anti-hero type of super-villain. [Disclaimer: do not read the remainder of this paragraph or you risk spoiling the end of the movie.] Then she comes to realize what she's doing is causing great harm and, in the end, she sacrifices herself to save the city." [Don't say I didn't warn you. Now, don't you just hate yourself?]

Yes, they're back, Severance and Winfrey, who collaborated on **BLACK SCORPION**, are performing an encore as star and director of the sequel. You'd think pulp fiction may have influenced Winfrey's penchant for cranking out action and superhero flicks. Think again, with the exception of *Mad* magazine, he laid off comic books. "I wasn't into *Superman* or *Batman*. But now that this is the second time I've done this movie, I'm much more interested in the following that goes with it. It's not something I looked for when choosing films, but it's become something I really enjoy. The script for the first **BLACK SCORPION** was outrageous and ambitious, and I wanted to see what we could do with it. That was the attraction—to do something completely different. And this fellow-up is much more outrageous than the first one, it's really demented and far out there, which is great. I love it."

Cost and time constraints notwithstanding, Hall has orchestrated a content-



Part I: As police officer Darcy, the Scorpion's alter ego, Joan Severance seduces her partner (Mark Cole). "Darcy is a bright-eyed girl in a man's world," says Severance.

ed set, he's adept at squeezing plot and character out of a trimmed budget. Production proceeded less smoothly for **NEW CRIME CITY**, an earlier sci-fi film that Winfrey helmed in Peru. "All the elements weren't coming together. I thought, 'Well, let's go completely the opposite way, and make it really whacked-out and fun.' And that's what I was thinking with the first **BLACK SCORPION**. I wasn't thinking we were going to make this a comic book style. I thought we were going to make something wild and crazy. But it wasn't working, so we pushed it to the **NEW CRIME CITY** limits. So when I took this project on, there was no question about not having a clear vision and getting derailed in a different direction. Now, we're pushing it through and it's really happening. **NEW CRIME CITY** is not a piece of junk, but it's not a film a lot of people get to

see, unfortunately. I really like it because we had such a fun time making it."

Winfrey savors the challenge of **BLACK SCORPION 2**—after all, it's comparatively "more ambitious" than its precursor. Here's the trend this time around:

What's out: "The producer's mind-set, saying, 'Cut this out that. Let's cut everything so we can make a movie in a certain amount of time.'"

What's in: "Now it's, 'I don't want to cut anything. I want to get in as much as possible.'"

"So we're kind of behind right now, but what I've gotten is really spectacular. But it's difficult because there are so many different characters, and you don't want to cut any out. They say the budget is less this time, but it feels like a bigger one all around. The production designer, Traci King, has done a great job. He has a real comic book sensibility. And Mark Cole, my

DP, has a good, commercial music video background that really enhances things. He's used a lot of Dutch angles and whip pans and things that add to the whole, crazy, wacky look. I remember when I saw **ROAD WARRIOR** when it first came out. That movie was so outrageous, but so hilarious, and pushed all the elements. It's not a movie like **RAIN MAN** or **TWISTER**, which appeal to a more general audience. I like those twisted, demented films, there is something about them that we all have inside of us. I wish we had more

money to polish it out and make it smoother. But it works for what it is—it's not **BARB WIRE**; that's all tits and action."

Craig J. Nevins, who wrote the screenplay, summarizes the scenario: "The **Black Scorpion** is a female *Batman*, a street vigilante who swaps her police badge for a mask in order to do justice to the City of Angels. She can do with a mask what she can't do with her badge and by law. Her father, a policeman, read her bedtime stories, particularly one about a scorpion who needed to get a ride across a river on a frog's back. The frog said, 'If I take you across, will you sing me?' and the scorpion promised he wouldn't, vowing 'If I do, we'll both drown.' Halfway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog. The frog asked, 'Why did you do that?' Now we're both doomed to die." And the scorpion said, 'I had to. It's in my nature.' And that is the theme of both *Scorpion* movies, she



"Buy bells to 'Giggles,'" says Robert Hall, special make-up and costume effects craftsman. "She hangs out with the villainous Gangster Frankster's cronies."

"The budget is less this time, but it feels like a bigger one. I wish we had more money, but it works for what it is; it's not BARB WIRE, that's all tits and action."

I'm the only one who's ever done anything with silicone skin for a Roger Corman film," says Hall. "We used it on JURASSIC PARK. It's a more advanced technique—a lot of smaller shops don't use silicone skin. That's one of the advantages of working at one of the bigger studios like Stan Winston's. But I get tons more enjoyment working on a smaller production. I'd much rather be the main guy on a small film and have fun, that's what it's all about. People take it too seriously. We're just making rubber monsters here, and having fun."

Sherrrie Rose, cast as Ursula Undershaft and Aftershock, is a veteran of the action genre (BROTHERS IN WAR, MAXIMUM FORCE). Describing her character's duality, she notes that Ursula, surviving the blast of her machine, "emerges from the rubble as Aftershock. I'm able to blast holes through buildings, and shake and drop whole cities into holes in the earth. I'm back and I'm pissed." Naturally, there's a showdown between Rose's comely criminal and the Black Scorpion. "I want to destroy her because she's

the good guy, she's with the cops—she represents them—and I feel the government is corrupt. She finds out who I am, so I need to destroy her; in order to do that I need to get the Black Scorpion Mobile, which I feel is her only defense against me. Then I have Gangster Frankster to do that, but, in return, he wants Beverly Heights which is like Beverly Hills. So I have to threaten all the rich people to move out or I'm going to bury their city."

Rose's past roles, including a past collaboration with Winfrey via NEW CRIME CITY, have been unified by a common theme: "A lot of revenge! It's exciting. I play it to the point where I don't have to push. I just did a film called THE NURSE where I played a nice girl and it was tough, because I'm so used to playing the avenger; you get a little more liberty and fun with it, and go a little stronger and harder. I often find it's easier to play vengeful than it is to play vulnerable parts. And playing characters who are beyond human is always fun because you can take

has to do what she has to do, even if it brings more turmoil into her life, even if she loses lovers or her job."

Scorpion's nemesis—the aforementioned Aftershock—is camouflaged behind a timid alter ego, Professor Ursula Undershaft, who's darker psyche is the consequence of corruption. "The mayor believes earthquakes are profitable for the city, bringing in federal relief," explains Nevins, "so he orders Ursula's 'earthquake prevention machine' to be sabotaged. It malfunctions, creating a larger earthquake and giving her a head wound in the process, hence, she becomes the 'Aftershock' and says, 'If the

mayor wants an earthquake, I'm going to give him one, and she's going to level the entire city by using her now-malfunctioning machine. But all she really wanted to do was good."

The Black Scorpion costume was designed by Robert Hall (ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU, THE RELIC) and Esther Lee. Hall collaborated with Ralph Love on Aftershock's costume, stitching together a composite of Winfrey's concepts. Hall, founder of the Almost Human company, also designed and applied makeup for other lead characters, including Gangster Frankster, who's head deflates in a meltdown. "I think

Genevieve describes Garrett Morris, supporting player and SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE vet, as "ill-tious. We threw lots of lines away and told them around."





BLACK SCORPION (l.) Robert Hall, applying make-up to Severance, utters his "the only one who's done anything with violence side for a Caravan film." Protecting Hall's costume to Part 1's outfit, Severance says, "The mask [works better]"



even more liberties. I'd love to do like a Wes Craven film or a horror movie. I like films where you transform, where you almost get to play two characters. [Rose previously "morphed" from human to "harpy from hell" in *DEMON KNIGHT*; see PP 3-2]. It's also a good metamorphosis within yourself when you get to do something like that, where you start off as one character and then you take revenge or you gain your power. I really like the idea of gaining your power back, and not playing the victim. That's certainly been a theme in my life, and I get to play it out through acting. But that's constantly a struggle

I have getting my own power back."

During the mid-'80s, Rose studied drama at the University of South Florida and subsequently toured with an acting troupe through Europe. She resumed her acting seminars in New York, and has worked with two acting coaches in Los Angeles. "There have been very few times in my life when I have not studied," Rose notes, "and that's usually if I'm doing films back-to-back." She has performed live theater but "didn't like sleeping on people's couches. I lived in my car for a while, lived in a trailer for a while, and I'm ready to make a little bit of money and have some comfort. I have a Winnebago, and part of the year I live in it and travel and meet people and just hang out. But I do love theater, and I may go back to New York for the summer and do that."

Seven years of martial

arts training has qualified Rose as a show-in for action roles. She continues to practice kung-fu fighting, "but now it's more for myself. I don't use drugs or alcohol anymore, and I've found that allows me to be more in touch with my feelings and not anesthetized. It also allows me to be more vulnerable to my feelings. That's been helpful in my acting. And, also in my life, I've never closed off any walks of Earth. When I travel in my Winnebago, I live in trailer parks and bang out with street people a lot.

"I work with Children of the Night and Children of the Shepherd, where I hang out with street punks in Hollywood and feed them. I think there are things I allow into my life, like guys I'm dating, which are usually whacked-out, crazy musicians or drug addicts or something. Then there's other amazing people I find who are very creative and talent-

ed, I've learned a lot from them. I don't close myself off to anybody."

Roles stressing her martial arts aptitude have dispatched Rose to foreign locations: "I've gotten to see different cultures and backgrounds, and the way different people act. I guess I'm trying to find out who I am without taking my family, my religion and my culture into that context. I'm searching just through my own soul, my heart and feelings. And I think you do that by examining different environments. Just being open to different religions and different cultures allows me to make up my own mind of who I am, without making those cultures make up who I am."

Joan Severance trades in her screen persona as a Black Widow (LAKE CONSEQUENCE, SEE NO EVIL, DANGEROUS INDISCRETION) to reprise her dual roles as The

Black Scorpion and Darcy. The actress prefers the sequel's superheroine threads over the costume tailored for the film's precursor. "The whole thing is better," smiles Severance. "—the wig fits better and the mask works better. The other had more rubber on my body, and it was always sweaty. And I couldn't get out of it—every time I had to go to the bathroom, I had to get help. This one I can take off myself." Darcy, the Black Scorpion's alter ego, has to be in this costume to be brave. And she worries that she has to wear thigh-high boots and tight leather to get a man's attention. Darcy is always confused; she's this bright-eyed girl, in a man's world, doing her job but not understanding a lot.

Compared to other projects, Severance pays BLACK SCORPION 2 as "a race. The first one was a race, and we won. We're winning this one, too. This one has gone a lot smoother than the previous BLACK SCORPION. And it's fun to play this kind of character because it's not real. The parts I've always done have been real people with real dilemmas, and that kind of hits me personally—I feel those things a long time. In this, both characters are not real and everything is a cartoon so it doesn't upset me, as a person, so much. It's a lot more fun to come to work. It's not a drama, not a comedy, it's a fantasy and therefore I remove myself from my feelings."

Severance cherishes the input from the supporting cast, including "henchmen" Stony Jackson, David Harris and Carl Banks. "They're wonderful, just wonderful. All of them come from improv. And Garrett Morris—he's hysterical—again, from improv. We throw a lot of the lines away and twist them around. We're like little kids playing." She also appreciates the inherent humor behind the disciplined sensibility of producer Roger Cor-

"It's not like TWISTER or RAIN MAN, which appeal to a general audience. I like twisted, demented films; there's something about them we all have inside of us."



Jonathan Werry (L), who directed Severance in BLACK SCORPION 1 & 2, says, "The sequel is more outrageous than the first."

man: "There's a certain campiness. You want to take things in a serious motif, but, with that campiness, it lets you know it's okay that it's a movie and you can still get drawn in."

Severance admits, however, her kinky costume isn't likely to turn into a fetish: "It's not natural, it's not comfortable. I don't see myself as this. But it gives you dramatic license to do almost anything when you're dressed as a bug. You can take charge, kick ass, do whatever you have to do and it's okay. You can blow people up. There are things that are okay for cartoon characters to do, but everyone has problems when real-life characters do them. But both BLACK SCORPION movies rendered characters within a comic cartoon situation, some of us looked like cartoon characters, but the cops are also cartoon characters and Darcy isn't real, either. She does have real character

dilemmas, but they're much more dramatic to her than to a normal character because she doesn't know how to handle them—until her writer tells her."

Despite the vexation of her costume—"especially those boots, with six-inch heels and two-inch platforms"—she concedes that "when the camera rolls, I'm the Black Scorpion and I have come to save the day. The whole pain of the costume and the uncomfortableness of it goes away, for that moment. And then they yell, 'Cut!', and my boots hurt and my shoulder pads hurt—I have a headache right now, wearing this mask. But I definitely feel, when I'm wearing the costume, that I could scare people and hurt them. But, unlike the Black Scorpion, I'm a total klutz; I cannot walk in heels—she can. She's an amazing thing."

Though she adhered to martial arts instruction for

the first film, Severance declined to resume her workouts for the sequel. "I would like to. But I bruise very easily, and get injured easily, and that's one of the reasons I haven't. But I have started studying Jiu Jitsu, which is a lot easier for women, it's not a contact sport. Instead of resistance, you become like part of your attacker and, by not resisting, you create a very interesting situation of being able to get out easier. When you're dead weight, in the right position, you win."

"In reality, you wouldn't see someone just kicking seven martial arts experts and winning. Doing the first BLACK SCORPION, we were shooting really late in crummy places and I felt totally safe. I would take the costume off, get into my regular clothes, leave my black painted eyes on and drive home through Compton. Now, that wasn't a smart thing to do, but I had the knowledge of what I had learned, and felt I could handle myself. I probably couldn't, but I had the confidence."

No, Severance's childhood fantasies didn't include a projection of herself as Wonder Woman or Sue Storm: "I still don't fantasize about comic book heroines, but Corman does. I guess I have the stature of a superhero. A lot of people have thought I had a very comic book face; big eyes, cheekbones and my coloring. Compared to the first BLACK SCORPION, my character has grown. Doing this kind of role has stretched my stamina a lot. My hat goes off to the Schwarzeneggers, Stallones and Van Dammes who play these sort of superpeople. It takes a lot out of you. It's a whole different kind of acting, something I had never done before—and here I am, doing it again. It's fun. Not that the other stuff isn't, but that's a whole other part of your heart and your soul. But this is more about your aura, the outside, and all these colors floating there can show and shine." □



Left: "Unlike Part I," notes Robert Hall, "Beverly's costume for the *BLACK SCORPION* sequel includes a corsetlike and anklet." Top: Sherry Jones (PP 9-10), as archvillain AFTERBLOOD, poses with exemplar Gangster Frankster (below, Sherry Jackson).





FEM FROM CRY

**AN ASIAN DIVA A
COMIC MELT TR**

By DAN S.

As **TALES FROM THE CRYPT** enters its 10th season, insiders speculated that it might be the last. But the Cryptkeeper's profitable franchise has spawned a couple of movie spin-offs, pro-

IMES THE PT

AND A "PLAYBOY"
THE MAUSOLEUM.

EROTTI

ended to the conclusion of its fifth
would pull the plug on the series.
over in licensing, not to mention
the show's encore for a sixth



Stand-up comic Rita Coyle
(left) is impersonated
with 'TALES' Crypt-Keeper
Above: "I love that little
dick!" Right: Vixen Wu in
VANISHING SON, a
four-part miniseries.





season, however, the familiar honeydew appears to have been appropriated by Urban Renewal, budgets have been trimmed and the ultraviolent "money shots," reflective of EC's graphically visceral payoffs, are conservatively debated.

Nevertheless, *CRYPT* is TV's only depot of horror entertainment that resists timidly tickling the jugular, the show retains a cutting edge, even if the lacerations have been deflated to a whiplash.

One edict that remains functional is an insistence on talent that can navigate the story to its tongue-in-cheek or dramatic denouement. A couple of seasons ago, *FF* organized interviews with the show's femmes (Traci Lords, Meredith Salenger, Brooke Shields, et al) for a retrospect titled *Temptresses from the Crypt* (2/2). Commemorating the show's longevity, we're returning to the Crypt for chats with a couple of sixth season guests. So gather 'round, kiddies, for a demonstration of diversity. Meet a *Playboy* comedienne who has the last laugh...and an Asian star whose sci-fi ties used to be a real scream.

Ria Coyne

The show's alterations are almost metaphorically telegraphed in "WhirlPool"; the episode opens with the Cryptkeeper remodeling his domicile. Fade to standup-

Facing for *CRYPT*'s Halloween bellybloss (p.75), Coyne makes headway with producer Gil Adler (below).



comedienne Rita Coyne in a vignette about "comic book stress levels" gone awry. Coyne, a native of Scranton, Pennsylvania, arrived in Los Angeles with \$75 in her pocketbook. Trained as an actress at the LACC Theatre Academy, Coyne defines herself as a composite Betty Boop, Goldie Hawn and Marilyn Monroe. Her role model? Danny DeVito. She's been a recurrent guest on the USA Network's UP ALL NIGHT and her live gigs include a stand-up routine, as one of the "Sex Kittens of Comedy," at Bailey's Catch A Rising Star in Las Vegas.

As a fledgling screen actress, Coyne had a brief role as Ken Archibald's mistress in CORPORATE AFFAIRS (1990). Although her screen visibility had expanded in NAKED OBSESSION, the only revisionist film in an otherwise arid "erotic thriller" genre, much of it was left on the cutting room floor. "I was kind of a comic relief in the film," she explains. "I play a topless bar dancer, who's best friends with the lead actress, Maria Ford."

Branching her stand-up tenure, Coyne admits that only a quirk of fate propelled her comedic career. Back in 1990, to support herself between roles, Coyne and her partner set up a small business called The Night Angels. Developing fashion exhibits for local restaurants and bars, her partner strutted on the runway as one of the models. Coyne moonlighted as the mistress of ceremonies, announcing the various ensembles.

"We would go around doing luncheon and night shows," recounts Coyne. "Since I had a theatrical background, it was only natural that I would be on the microphone to introduce the models. Many times, the models would be late, wouldn't show up, the clothes would rip and I'd just be left standing there. So, of course, I started telling jokes to the audience."

RIA COYNE

"Sometimes, with B-films, you're working your ass off and conditions are horrible. The people, including the casting directors, are rotten; they have a real overblown view of themselves"



When a Desert Storm Met... immortalized in *completism*, in the CRYPT episode, Come the Dawn. "I enjoyed the role; it's so different from my own personality."

Playboy magazine, in search of a vocation that could be exotically photographed, scouted for photogenic, female comics. Coyne, who had tallied six months of road experience, applied for a spread: "I called and spoke to a wonderful woman at Playboy who told me to come in. They took Polaroids of me and it took six months to close the deal. They finally decided that I would be one of the five girls they used for the June, 1991 pictorial."

Working as a Playboy model wasn't a breeze, "I worked for two days on that shoot, and each was a 12 hour day. The first day we did an on-location thing of me at a club: me on the microphone, reaction shots of the audience—anything that pertained to my line of work. They take thousands of pictures, some with different dresses on, some with

different earrings on, some with the audience facing a different way, some with me facing a different way."

"The day I shot I had laryngitis and could hardly stand up. The next day we did what they call the fantasy shots, which are the nude or semi-nude shots. They spend a whole day just doing that. I even personalized that shoot, because I asked them if it would be all right to bring some of my own props from home. I'd put a Betty Boop doll over here, and little things I like there—I figured it would make it look more real."

"In the fantasy shots, they also photograph you in different outfits. They are perfectionists. They have a girl there that makes sure every piece of your lingerie is on perfectly. They have a hair person there, they have the makeup person there, they have the lighting per-

son there. By lunch time, the morning shots are developed and on the editor's desk for examination. Playboy generally won't hire girls who have previously posed nude for another magazine. They're really a class act."

Striking a rapport with the bunny company, Coyne was hired for related gigs. Her most lucrative assignment was on the Playboy Channel. The pre-planned concept involved a sampling of Coyne's comic spiel, though a rigid format had not been determined. "I went to their station and created the character of Candy Cracker, P.I.," grins Coyne. "They didn't want to do sketch comedy, so I came up with this show."

"Candy is the female version of Inspector Clouseau, a bumbling female detective who solves crimes of an erotic nature. It's campy and funny. There are 5 and 10-minute episodes. A typical show would have government agents appeal to Candy to track down someone who is putting itching powder in condoms. They required one topless segment per show."

Coyne not only starred as Cracker, she wrote scripts and acted as associate producer. She also retained rights to her character and the series.

Her CRYPT episode, directed by Mick Garris, is devoid of burlesque: "My character is a literal cartoon-come-to-life named Velma. She is a brazen, shameless leech who basically will use and abuse anyone. She springs to life from the storyboard and she'll do anything—including murder—to get what she needs. I was working with other stand-up comics on that show, including Richard Lewis and Rita Rudner. So it was sort of like a stand-up comic show."

CRYPT's recent resistance to a swirl of sex and violence may be attributable to the Fox network picking-up syndication rights. "We shot one scene for HBO and the other one for Fox Tele-

sion, so there are two versions," enlightens Coyne. "In the one for Fox Television, I'm attired in my busiest full time. But in the version for HBO, you see my breasts for a brief time. They shot the scene two separate ways."

Coyne's off-screen flirtations were reserved for her best. "I've always loved that show, and I love that little doll," she giggles. "The Cryptkeeper is the best part. A couple of Saturdays after I shot my episode, I went to see how they made him. I was so obsessed with the little creature. It takes something like three people to operate him and he looks so real. It's unbelievable!"

Developing a repertoire of characters, Coyne regards each role as "different people. For instance, in *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, they knew what they wanted but it was up to the actress to bring it to life. I added the New York accent, yelling 'Yuck. Do it. Do it!' I gave the director five different options. Did he want it stupid? Did he want it bright? French? Sometimes they have a very definite idea of what the character should be, but most of the time they give you some leeway, after all, it's the artist who breathes life into the character. The good directors work with the artist."

"As 'Rose' in *LEGAL BRIEFS*, I put on glasses which I don't wear for *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*. I actually went in dressed the way I thought the character would dress." Coyne's portrayal was influenced by Marilyn Monroe's gold digger in *HOW TO MARRY A MILLIONAIRE*: "Rose is a little eccentric, everything she wears is bright. She's a little bit bigger than life. Her main desire is to be an entertainer, a topless dancer, but she works in a legal office. This was another dark comedy. Rose's boss is a jerk and he's ripping off all these people. That character was a lot of fun because it was a very low-budget film, and they really let

VIVIAN WU

"In *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*, I commit suicide by eating a poisonous cookie. In all of my roles, so far, I either get killed or have to share a man with five other women. Very dramatic."



Wu in *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III*. "The turtles were strictly controlled, when they acted, I could hear the clicking sounds of the equipment."

me do what I wanted. I have this scene on the phone and I decided to make this voodoo doll of my boss and stick things in it. I have a noose around his neck and I swing it back and forth."

The vagaries of an acting career also took their toll on Coyne's role in *BATMAN FOREVER*. The casting office for the Batman saga's third installment was paying through the Academy Players Directory; the management closed in on Coyne's pictures and called her agent. "They thought I was older! They were looking for someone in their fifties, but I'm in my early thirties. When I went for the audition, it was in an office that actually had air conditioning. It was so nice! Sometimes, with these B-films, you're working your ass off and the conditions are horrible and the people are rotten—including the casting directors. They have a real overblown view of themselves. But these people were real humble and down to earth. I met with Joel Schumacher, the direc-

tor, who was wonderful."

The studio was originally casting for a trio of older actresses who'd be on the payroll for six weeks. But the threesome was whittled down to a Coyne solo act: "I'm a socialite who wears a magenta wig at a party in Gotham City. We shot at the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood. Jim Carrey's Riddler is having a big party. They have these fantasy booths; through your brain waves, when you enter the booth, your fantasy comes to life. My fantasy was to have all these diamonds. When Two Face [Tommy Lee Jones] crashes the party, I'm involved in that scene, too. Joel tries to keep a very positive attitude on the set, because there are long hours and a lot of money at stake."

Vivian Wu

She's a charming woman who punctures any pretense of frigid formality with unencumbered laughter. Born in China, Vivian Wu declared her acting aspirations by the time she turned sixteen. Learning the Eng-

lish language, she appeared in over 15 films before moving to Los Angeles.

"I've worked with great directors," says Wu. "My first English-language film was Bernardo Bertolucci's *THE LAST EMPEROR*. Bernardo is Italian! He's always smiling and he's very soft. For my performance, I received a nomination for best actress at the Italian Film Festival. Because of that movie, I was able to start my career in Hollywood."

Upon her arrival in the U.S., Wu plunged into her craft, consulting a myriad of acting and dialogue coaches. "On *HEAVEN AND EARTH*, [director] Oliver Stone showed a lot of respect to the artists, including me," she continues. "I had a very good working relationship with him. He was very open to choices and he listens to what actors have to say."

Her career shadows the professional cocooning of Jean Chen (*FF 2.2*), an Asian beauty who vacated *TWINS PRANKS* in 1991 and, two years later, surfaced in the *CRYPT's* "Food For Thought" episode. "Jean Chen played the first wife in *THE LAST EMPEROR* and I played the second," recalls Wu. "We worked again on *HEAVEN AND EARTH*. She played the mother and I played the rich mistress of the house. She worked for me that time—she was the maid."

Impressed with Wu's work, director Wing Wang cast the actress in *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*. "I played A-ma's mother who is the fourth concubine to a rich man. She was raped and her family kicked her out. She goes back home to see her dying mother. She cuts her arm and makes the broth to honor her mother. Finally, she commits suicide by eating the poison cookie."

"Wing Wang is an incredible director. Wing is very detailed. He's very patient. You trust him and you want to do everything for him. He has a good heart. You feel that you're not only working, but you're making a



Top: Developing her own character for the Playboy Channel, Coyne served as writer and associate producer of *Candy Crackin'* (R). "She's the female version of Inspector Clooney." Inset: Coyne converses with Michael Kay and Terese Creepe (*OUT OF THE DARK, NAUUS*) at the *Melrose* inspired screening party.

good friend."

Wu is no stranger to the fantasy genre. Back in 1982, she spent six weeks on her first Hollywood picture, *THE GUYVER*. The film, which merges outer space monsters and chop socky choreography, is a perennial repeater on the Sci-Fi Channel. "That was my first encounter with monsters," she laughs. "I played Mitsuki, the Japanese girl and scientist's daughter, who's screaming all the time. I'm Mark Hamill's sidekick."

"That movie was based on a very popular Japanese comic book. I had a great time working with Mark Hamill, who I had admired for a long time. On the first day, the monsters kept trying to scare me. I'd be putting on my makeup and I'd feel something tapping on my shoulder. I'd looked up and there was this huge monster, twice as big as me, looking down."

The film, shot in a warehouse in California's San Valley, strained Wu's vocal cords as well as her nerves: "I had to scream all the time! By the end of the day, my voice would be gone because I had to be grabbed by these monsters throughout the entire shoot and have to scream and scream and scream. That was quite amusing. I didn't have to do much more than scream. The most interesting thing was watching the special effects, particularly how they made these monsters. The actors inside those body suits had to work very hard because it was very hot. We shot in the summer. They had to take off the heads just to get some air."

Her next genre film, *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III*, was afforded a more luxurious budget and an expanded cult audience. "I played Princess Mitu," smiles the 3' 7" Wu. "We

shot the film in Oregon for about three months. For that movie, I had to train to get in shape to be able to do martial arts. I trained very intensively for two months prior to the shooting. It was the most charming film I worked on. The first day I had to work with the Turtles was hilarious. I keep cracking up because, for the second time, I was working with monsters, then again, they're not really monsters. But they're definitely not human."

"The turtles were so funny but it was very complicated. We had remote controllers and all the wires, and people controlling the turtles, and actors inside the costumes. When the Turtles were acting, you can hear the clicking sounds of the equipment. A very enjoyable role for me."

Wu developed a love of horseback riding from her experience on the film. "I rode a lot of horses in that

Off-screen, when I didn't work, I would go to the beach, and mount a very naughty female horse named Smokey. It was the most fun experience of my life. One time, I rode to the water and the horse tripped and the two of us fell in the water. I loved her. I told all my friends that when I get rich, which I hope is very soon, I'm going to buy a horse. I had to learn horseback riding for that picture. I went to Sunset Ranch and had a trainer there. Every morning, for two months before the filming, I took karate training and horseback riding. I really worked hard for that role."

Not unlike other high profile actresses—including Karen Allen, Tia Carrere, Terry Farrell and Tracy Scoggins—Wu was cast, last summer, in a CD-interactive game. It's called *SUPREME WARRIOR*, and I play the

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FOREVER JANET

FOREVER KNIGHT'S VAMP FUMES OVER THE SHOW'S "BAYWATCH"

By LAWRENCE TETESKY

It's official: **FOREVER KNIGHT**, the syndicated series that created a compatible milieu for vampires and vice squads, has bit the dust. The series' cancellation may be attributable to excessive and inane interference, by the USA Network, during the final season. But the absence of Janette had already taken a bite out of the show's core audience. Played by Deborah Duchene, the exotic heroine's century-spanning relationship with long suffering "Nickola" (Goran Visvjee) was among the genre's more poignant, bittersweet love affairs. And nobody was more surprised by Janette's erotic oeuvre than Duchene herself. "Her look was quite important to the character," Duchene remarked last February, during a night off from **A WINTER'S TALK** rehearsals. A fringe production of the Shakespeare play was scheduled for a Toronto debut, concurrent with this same period, the fate of **FOREVER KNIGHT** was still undetermined. "Aside from the vampire trappings, there was plenty of time in the make-up trailer, since almost half of each episode is a historical flashback," continued Duchene. "It involves lots of period costumes, so a lot of the work you see on the screen is really the artistry of the make-up and hair and



Regaling as **FOREVER KNIGHT**'s blood hunter, Deborah Duchene smiles. "This femme fatale thing was a big joke for me. I always played comic-types before."

wardrobe departments."

For the uninitiated, **FOREVER KNIGHT** was launched as a 1989 CBS pilot with Rick Springfield as a moody "vampire cop" trying to become human again while fighting crime in L.A. The original Janette, played by Fran Ryan, was a "one scene character," written as a stuffy, unpleasant madam-bossess of an anonymous nightclub—where the vampire and fringes meet after hours—she had obviously

been embroiled in Nick's more sordid past. After a ropeset network airing, a reworked version was developed into a series as part of **CRIME TIME AFTER PRIME TIME**, CBS's late-night experiment to bait viewers with "mature" entertainment; the show was almost entirely recast and transplanted from L.A. to Toronto locations. Duchene somewhat proudly admits to having never seen the Springfield version, neither

before nor after her casting. She suspects her own hand-picked wardrobe nailed her the role of Janette: "I wore a choker, and they liked that. Nobody was wearing them then [circa 1991-2, the first season]; of course, now they've become passe. It was a great look playing a vampire, because it's so opposite of anything I'd ever played before. This femme fatale thing was just a big joke for me because I had, if anything, always played fairly ingenuous, comic-types before, certainly nothing at all glamorous."

Born in Montreal, Duchene traveled around Quebec and Ontario, eventually ending up at McGill University. She had aspired for a business degree, until an amateur production of *Agnes of God* beckoned; she was spotted by an agent, who introduced the fledgling actress to a myriad of theatrical productions. Numerous roles followed, including a turn as Lucy Seward in *Dracula*, along with *Playboy of the Western World*, *The Sound of Music*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Duchene also performed guest appearances in syndicated series shot in Toronto, including **KUNG FU: THE NEXT GENERATION**, **MATRIX**, **COUNTERSTRIKE**, and **STREET LEGAL**. "I've been very fortunate in the past few years and I've had pretty steady work, even though I don't have any desire to be part of the Hollywood system. I think if I was 22 years old I may have want-

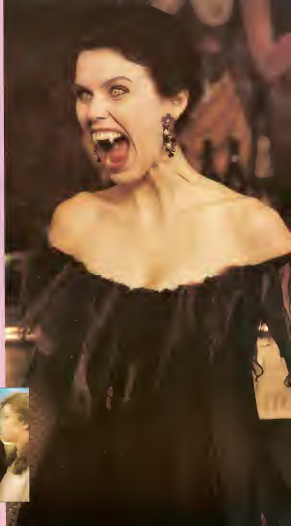
TE

INFLUENCE.

ed that, but I'm coming in to it later, so I have no desire to do that whole thing I would much rather stay in Toronto and Canada and do my thing here. I can do theatre, which is my true first love. There's nothing more satisfying to me than being on stage where there's Shakespeare in my mouth. It's so much more involving in every way—physically and emotionally, and in terms of the work you do to prepare.

"It's not that I don't enjoy working in front of the camera, or that I don't respect it, because I do. I think it's just a different skill. I'm not fond of formula television, and having to say lines that I think are stupid. But sometimes you have to do that to make the money to do theatre. So what you do is say the lines that are stupid the best you can and then, once in a while, you get some lines that are not stupid and—hopefully!—you can do

Right: Duchovne in "Pale Horse Ties Death." Below: Turning mortal in "The Human Factor," she straddles the bond between Rock and NiteLife.



them some justice."

Duchene was intrigued by the revised premise of the series, developed by James D. Parriott, that acclimated the flexibility of vampires and their acclimation to a constantly changing world. "When the auditions came around," she remembered, "I just sort of pulled around and found this part of me that liked to fantasize about being glamorous. It had something to do with the nature of being a vampire, because I felt I wanted to reach for the depth that vampires must have. Even though there were plenty of opportunities for some nice ironic, dry humor, there must also be an incredible depth to living that long and seeing so much, all the while treading a moral line."

Initially, *FOREVER KNIGHT* proved a bit hard to find. Many CBS affiliates opted for syndicated reruns in the late-night post-news spot, nevertheless, the series attracted a significant cult retinue. Its popularity traversed to Europe, where the running time per episode was supplemented with more "explicit" footage. "Since it was my first series, I really didn't know what to expect," Duchene admitted. "I felt quite tentative, and kept wondering what they wanted—whoever they were—and I couldn't stop thinking that way. My part was quite small in the first season, but I kept hearing about how responsive the fans were, which to me was so surprising." Not as surprising was the first cancellation of *FOREVER KNIGHT*; David Letterman's move to CBS prompted the network to dissolve *CRIME TIME*.

"When we went on that long hiatus, I was pretty sure we wouldn't be coming back," recounted Duchene. "I was quite surprised when we were called back for a second season because, as an actress, you've been struggling and struggling until suddenly you've got a series, everybody tells you

DEBORAH DUCHENE

"During a very passionate kiss, I bit down on his tongue with my fangs and drew blood. I didn't realize how long they actually were! It's one of the first hazards of playing a vampire!"



The cast of *FOREVER KNIGHT* (clockwise from left): Gerald Wynn Davis, John Kapelos, Catherine Disher, Nigel Barnett, Nicholas Chouh and Deborah Duchene.

that you've hit the money pot, but it's not all that big, and then you become prey to those thoughts again—Do they like me? Are they going to keep me on? Will they write more or less for me? You become completely insecure. I went through a bit of that, until I ultimately realized that it was fairly pointless to worry because there were too many factors involved—many of them plain business, that I couldn't affect. Then I realized that I was just really glad that we were back for a second season, and I was surprised at just how glad I was. I didn't realize I had wanted to come back that badly."

Janette flourished in *FOREVER KNIGHT*'s second season, which included

an exposition of her genesis: surviving a moribund existence as a French prostitute more than 800 years ago, she was consigned to blood-driven immortality by LaCroix (Nigel Bennett). Her continued interactions with Nicholas established an intriguing triangular relationship; while Janette personified the visceral passions of vampire love, Nick pendulously struggled between past memories and his desire for mortality, the latter represented by his relationship with Dr. Natalie Lambert (Catherine Disher) who was always seeking a cure for Nick's "condition." "The second season was a lot more interesting for me," asserted Duchene. "I had more to do, and it felt like

they were giving Janette some nice dimensions."

As the series moved into first-run syndication of its second season, production values increased as the rigors of vampire acting continued unabated. "It was mostly humorous," Duchene grinned. "A classic one that I always think of—because I had so many kissing scenes with Nicholas when we had our fangs in—was in the first season episode, 'Cherry Blossoms.' During a very passionate kiss, I bit down on his tongue with my fangs, because I didn't realize just how long they actually were. He was in lots of pain, especially since I drew first blood. That's one of the first hazards of playing a vampire. Also, it's very hard to speak clearly with fangs. You tend to lisp a lot, which doesn't give you a whole lot of natural authority and dignity."

Janette's expanding popularity rendered alterations, orchestrated by the USA Network during the show's third season, no less than incomprehensible. USA insisted upon introducing new characters to take the place of established regulars; already burned by *SILK STALKINGS*, the network conceptualized this "safety valve" to discourage the defection of leading actors. According to the Internet, which perpetually hums with *FOREVER KNIGHT* communique, USA dismissed Duchene because she lacked the sex appeal compliant with the show's "new direction." Duchene partially concurred with the rationale: "My not coming back for the third season was due to a number of factors. I was planning to go back as per my contract, and my contract was not going to be renewed as it was written. I was offered the opportunity to come back under different circumstances that did not fulfill my contract."

"They [USA and assorted production partners] realized that they wouldn't be using me as much as my contract originally required. When it was first drawn up,

my contract stipulated an increase in usage with each succeeding year. It's my feeling that when USA bought the show, they wanted to go in a much younger direction, aiming for the 18-34-year-old male target. I hadn't realized that I wasn't young enough for that age. I told them that I was pretty insulted that my contract wasn't going to be renewed as was stipulated, and that I didn't want to settle for considerably less...and that, mostly, I didn't like the direction in which they were planning to take the show, which was *actually* stated as planning to compete with **BAYWATCH**! I didn't want to do that, it kept me from doing other things, and it wasn't as if I'd be working enough to make it worthwhile. They decided not to honor the original agreement for fees and usage, and I didn't want to take their offer."

Then came the USA bailout, in a somewhat redundant decision of scheduling, the reteled third season of **FOREVER KNIGHT** premiered in late 1995 with "Black Buddha," a two-part episode. The broadcasts stretched through four consecutive nights in the 10-00 PM slot. Viewer reaction was immediate and horrendous. By Christmas time, USA had become so disenchanted with the revitalized **FOREVER KNIGHT** that the series was "cancelled." Translation: yanking the show from its premiere spot, the network arbitrarily broadcast new episodes in shifting late night slots.

The restoration of script quality and character integrity grew as the **BAYWATCH** influence diminished. As a bonus, Janette returned for an exemplary episode. "I promised Ger that I would do one show if he directed it, and came up with a story idea," noted



Above: Duchene poses as Janette. Right: Ger's belated bid to "steal" *Forever Knight*. "You tap with fangs and tend to lose sightly."

Duchene, "which he did, so I did. It was actually a lot of fun to do. It was shot just before the Christmas break, and Ger did a really fine job directing."

The episode, "The Human Factor," dealt with Janette's metamorphosis into a human. Among the few implausibilities is Nick's erroneous diagnosis of Janette; their relationship's longevity notwithstanding, he initially can't fathom that she's physically and emotionally divorced herself from the undead. Nevertheless, the revelation regarding Janette's conversion shatters the already tending bond between Nick and Natalie. Janette explained that she had fallen in love, and had extracted only a minimal amount of blood from

her savior during their love-making. She was so smitten with the gentleman that her love not only prevailed over his murder, but provoked her transformation into a human.

Aside from the internal dramatic tensions, **THE HUMAN FACTOR** also generated a certain amount of Internet controversy. Informed sources insist that the climax of the show was drastically re-edited. The broadcast version concluded with Janette's apparent self-sacrifice in a fire; she expires in an effort to save her deceased lover's son, while resisting Nick's offer of life support via vampirism. In the show's tag, it's ambiguously implied that the criminals who killed Janette and her

lover were eventually wiped-out by a vampire—Nick, perhaps. Nick subsequently meets LaCroix who, previously unenlightened to Janette's mortality, demands the facts behind her human reclamation.

The original version faded-out with Nick rescuing Janette, despite her protestations, with the artificial life applied by a vampire bite. There had been speculation the ending was altered to afford Janette the liberty of returning to the series, pending upon its fourth season renewal. However, the last episode concluded with the termination of nearly all the major continuing characters, hence, an-



other resurrection seems unlikely.

Equally unlikely is Duchene's voluntary incarnation as Janette. Aside from the frustration of waiting an average two years between seasons, she's also somewhat disturbed by the "intensity" of the fan scene. "I found that the couple of conventions that I went to were mixed bags," said Duchene, "although one was actually quite lovely."

As for her future agenda, Duchene was "concentrating so much on **A WINTER'S TALE** that I haven't made any definite plans for afterwards, so I know I'll be staying in Toronto. But beyond that, I'm not sure exactly what I'll be doing. I'll just have to see what comes around." □

ERO

LANDON HALL: FROM

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Plots are optional—more often, nonexistent—in Cinemax's **EROTIC CONFESSIONS**, an episodic series of fleshy vignettes which grind out a surplus of softcore action. The dialogue ("My boy got dissed by a lapdancer?," "Are you turned on when you know a stranger is watching?") is purrred, maimed or unnecessary, actors more often communicate with each other via the Braille system. Naturally, the show premiered to huge ratings and has been renewed for a second season. Ingenues, competing for exposure, have besieged the producers with resumes. Landon Hall is one of the few actresses whom HBO executives invited back for an encore appearance. Though she performs the obligations of the series with conviction, Hall may be reluctant to be pigeonholed as "eye candy."

Born in Virginia Beach, Hall was declared winner of a local bikini competition when spotted by a photogra-

Left: "I'm not modest in the least, that's just my way." Below: Hall as a spirit in **LITTLE WITCHES**; "They glued a skull mask & feathers on my face."



TIC CONFESSOR

PUPPETMASTER III TO DIFF'RENT STROKES WITH DANA PLATO.

pher "He took a lot of shots of me," Hall remembers, "and put some in the local paper. He hooked me up with a modeling agency. I didn't really like doing it, but it was making me good money at 15 years old. The modeling was fun but, when I look back on it, I like the acting so much more."

Cast in a student film, the green-eyed pupil developed a fondness for drama. Upon graduation from high school, she cruised to the Mecca of movie star wannabes: Los Angeles.

Hall circumvented the financial straits that imperil starlets when they're finally shaken by Hollywood reality. "I had a gig modeling that saved my ass when I first moved out here. It was for a fur company. That saved me, because I got that when I walked off the plane. I went to the first modeling agency and they said, 'You'd be perfect for this job.' I went in and got a job modeling furs three or four times a week. That was only about \$1,000-\$1,200 but that was all I needed to keep afloat for a while."

Jobs as a waitress and bartender supplemented her income. "I was under age," she explains, "and I worked at a place called Spec's, a rock club in Hollywood. But once they caught wind of my age, that was the end of me."

Ironically, Hall's modeling profession stereotyped her in a image that faded with her film career. "I did a bunch of covers for *Brudel* magazine," she recounts. "I was the bride—the 'little good girl'—a lot. I still do modeling here and there."

The virginal roles weren't limited to still pic as a blushing bride. Cast in the Magnolia Playhouse production of *King Lear*, Hall "had the part of Cordelia, the sweet daughter. That was interesting for me because I didn't know how I'd deal with Shakespeare. The lingo was hard, but once you got used to it, it becomes kind of easy and



Hall's debut in *PUPPET MASTER III* (1990), "a small part with Michelle Bauer" (center) and Walter Gotell, who played General Gogol in the James Bond films.

you forget about the phrasing. That was the best thing I've done because, once you do Shakespeare, you can pretty much do almost anything in theatre."

Stage fright seems to be part and parcel of the actor's trade and Hall was no exception. "When I started acting in Virginia, I would get butterflies," she admits. "But when I moved out here, that's when the terror began. It took a while, but I don't really get nervous anymore. My hands used to shake uncontrollably."

Making her film debut in Fall Moon's *PUPPETMASTER III*, Hall appeared topless in "a small part with Michelle Bauer. It was a two-day gig. I was one of the girls in a brothel."

Cast as a psychic in *STOLEN HEARTS*, Hall's screen time substantially expanded. "This guy rips off my best friend and takes off with her money. Basically, the whole movie is them trying to track down this guy. I was the lead. I loved being the focus of everyone's attention. There was a lot of pressure when you only shoot for two weeks, and you're doing 8 to 10 pages of dialogue per day."

Her subsequent film, *VICIOUS KISS*, united Hall with erotic thriller diva Monique Parent and the late

Margaux Hemingway. "I worked on that about four days," notes Hall, whose character is wiped out by a jealous lover. "Monique plays the wife of a rich, powerful man who collects antiques. She kills him and much of the movie flashes back to an explanation of why she kills him. I'm the reason. She kills him because he falls in love with me. I'm in the beginning and the end. I play the mistress. The bad girl."

OTHER MEN'S WIVES required Hall to polarize herself from *fellows* to *foes*. "That's right, I'm the good girl this time. It's about a womanizer who only dates married women, women he can't have. He almost gets killed in one of his affairs, and it kind of brings him to the realization that he has to change his life—and not be such a schmuck. He happens to meet me when he comes to that revelation, and he falls in love with me. But, at the end, he gets murdered."

"I like the hitch—*bad girl* roles—but I always seem to get the good girl roles. That's probably because I do mostly good girl stuff. I guess we all want what we can't have. But I tend to always get the nice girl."

Answering the casting call for *EROTIC CONFESSIONS*, Hall not only nailed the lead for "A Model Situation" but picked up a role in another episode, "Games People Play." "The whole series is about relationships," advises the actress. "In my debut segment, I play a student who falls in love, at first sight, with an art student. He ignores me many, many times when I try to approach him. My character is very shy. I try to get him to ask me out and I become very frustrated. I show up in his art class one day, and I become one of the models to get his attention. It works to the point where he walks out of the class and leaves me there kind of shaken. We fi-

nally fall in love.

"There was one love scene at the end of the show, but its focus was on the lives of two people. It was shot in three days. But the focal point in 'Games People Play,' which was shot in only two days, was on sex."

The high volume of scripts prompted a two-week casting session. "I heard that the EROTIC CONFESSIONS producers pretty much saw everybody in town," smiles Hall. "Everybody I know went up for them. They'd fax sides to me, and I study them, and go in for the audition. They put you on tape and send the tape to HBO, who'd then look at the day's taping and pick the people they want to call back. They gave me different material for my second audition, which was attended by the casting director, the director and somebody from HBO. They watch you, and tape you again, and narrow it down. You go back for a final call back but, this time, they do a body check."

"Anytime there is any nudity at all, they have you do body checks. Sometimes you get to wear underwear and a bra, but, sometimes, they ask you not to wear a bra. They do body checks to make sure you're not hiding something behind your clothes, they want to make sure you look like your picture, that you're physically compatible with scenes requiring you to be nude or walking around in your underwear. The casting director will usually be present, but they usually have a woman in the room. Sometimes they tape the body check, sometimes they don't. Sometimes you can just go in a bathing suit."

Even actresses who routinely resign themselves to nudity have, in past interviews, described the "body check" as the audition's "most dreadful" demand. While acquiescing to the practicality of the process, Hall draws the line. "There was a show—I won't say what it was—that I was going to work on. They wanted to do two body checks, and I had already done one which had been taped. And they wanted the three girls they picked to do it again. My manager and I refused. Once they put you on tape, there's no reason to bring you back in for another body check."

Cast as "Annie" in "Games People Play," Hall writes to series host Jacqueline Stone (Ava Fabian) about



CHANCE: AN EROTIC CONFESSION "The *Shout* Season 3 episode was filmed in about three days. There was one love scene at the end of the show. I knew, going in, it was going to be sexy and racy."

her experiences in a strip poker game which turned into a torrid *Truth or Sexual Dare* tournament; Annie was challenged to make love to her girlfriend, Laura.

"My character is very confused about her sexuality," Hall explains. "It's about her exploration of various sexual scenarios. During the card game, they talk about relationships and different things in their lives. My character is very curious about her sexuality, because she doesn't quite know what's going on. So the show leads into my character trying to find her sexuality."

I can't resist firing that perennial question, *Weren't you wearing a navel ring in that episode?* "Oh, I've had that for about four years," Hall laughs. "I've always liked earrings and I thought it would be cool to have my bellybutton pierced."

As if the rigors of modeling and act-

ing weren't enough, Hall has tested another entertainment venue, she sings with Glass Eden whenever the ensemble performs at Hollywood clubs. "The band has a guy and girl singer," says Hall. "It's kind of Nine Inch Nails-meets-Hole, Courtney Love's band. It's cool and I have kind of the punk edge. We've been recording an album on Capitol Records, a division of Capitol."

No stranger to vocalizing, Hall portrayed Sandy in a school production of *Grease*. "I have always written lyrics for the guys," grins Hall. "I lived with a musician for three years, and I've always been surrounded by musicians. My friend was putting a band together and he thought I'd be great, so he invited me to come down for an audition. I've been wanting to do this for a long time. Our goal is to be picked up by a bigger label. They would just have to buy us out of our contract with Reality."

But with her career picking up steam, Hall isn't afforded the rehearsal time for jammies; she's too preoccupied with fine tuning her first love. "I've studied with quite a few acting teachers out here, and every teacher you work with has their own method. I take different aspects from each, bits and pieces that work for me. I stay in acting classes because it keeps me right there."

Auditions, which have averaged one per day for Hall, can wreak havoc on a film novice's nerves—not to mention her wheels. "Sometimes you may have to drive 30 miles to the audition," she says. "If you get called back, you drive 30 miles again. The third call back is usually the final cut. There is so much work just to get the part."

Hall's spring 1996 release, *OVER THE WIRE*, was touted by its distributor, TriStar Entertainment, with a cross-country tour. The low-budget film is a hybrid of the erotic thriller and whodunit genres. A telephone lineman overhears a woman's scheme to murder her sister. Our hero rushes to the intended victim's house only to discover that both the sisters live in the same residence. Hall, directed by Fred Olen Ray, plays one of the siblings. "They make me out as the bad, bitchy sister," she says while rolling her eyes. "But then I end up being the 'good one' at the fade-out. The

LONDON HALL

"I like bad girl roles, y'know, 'the bitch,' but I always seem to get the virtuous, 'good girl' roles."

hardest part of this role was that I play someone older, a character in her late '20s. There had to be a difference between the two sisters. Rachel, written as the younger sister, was played by Shauna O'Brien (*FF 4:3*). In real life, I'm a little younger than her but I play her older sister. They put my hair up, and dressed me very sophisticated, and put on a lot of makeup. We shot the film in two weeks. Fred Ray is the one-take wonder—you better get it right the first or second time. Fortunately, I've always been good at memorizing lines."

Although she's lifted herself from anonymity, Hall still racks the lament of all fledgling actors: rejection. "When you're turned down after an audition, you just have to tell yourself, 'It's not me.' It has nothing to do with you. It can be one little thing why you don't get a part. I learned, early on when I was modeling, that you don't get every gig. You have to be secure with yourself and confident in your ability—that comes from working hard at something, and knowing that you gave it your best."

The actress just wrapped a guest

Right: "I don't have a problem with my body, I'm proud of it." *Sister: Her "bitchy sister" blonde cracks in OVER THE WIRE.*



role on **HOTLINE**, a new HBO series: "In the 'Shutterbug' episode, I play a real women's libber. The show is about my relationship with my boyfriend, who's a photographer, and how we work through everything. My boyfriend is offered a lot of money to take pictures of showgirls and strippers. My character is against any exploitation of women, and she feels betrayed he would even consider doing it. They have a confrontation and she leaves him, but she comes back. Everything works out for them. He takes the pictures and she opens her eyes, realizing the photos are not degrading. Our director, Jane Simpson, was incredible to work with."

Indisputably, Hall's inclination to perform sans wardrobe is partially attributable to her frequent employment. "As a rule of thumb, I won't do nudity unless I'm the pivotal character, like in **OVER THE WIRE**. I won't take a role as 'the girl'—you know, someone who comes in for one day and does a sex scene. I don't have a problem with nudity if it's story-driven and I'm the lead of the picture."

"In **EROTIC CONFESIONS**, we're supposed to be competing with Zalman King's **RED SHOE DIARIES**. That's what Cinemax wanted to do. So, going in, I knew it was going to be sexy and racy. But I really liked the director Peter Bunch, and producer Marilyn Vance, and they assured me that it was going to be shot tastefully. And I think it was. I'm not modest in the least. I'm very free and open. That's just my way. If people don't like it, then too bad. *Merr!*"

"I've turned down a lot of stuff. For the longest time, when I came out here, I wouldn't do nudity. Not because Landon has a problem with her body, I don't have a problem and I work really hard on my body. I'm proud of it. I just thought that if I did nudity, people wouldn't take me seriously as an actress. Then came the realization that if I like the script, then who cares what anyone else thinks? If I like the script and the people I'm working with—and it's a large part or the lead in a film, and it's for a large company like HBO or Andrew Stevens' company and it's going to get me a lot of exposure—then I don't have a problem."

Connections in Hollywood are the



Hall indirectly launched her career as winner of a titillating competition, photos, printed in her hometown newspaper, landed modeling jobs. "Posing was fun but, in retrospect, I like the acting so much more."

town's stock in trade. When **HOTLINE** director Jane Simpson was casting her new film, **LITTLE WITCHES**, she remembered Hall: "It's a kid's movie. These young school girls, 16-18 years old, get in a bunch of trouble. They try to conjure up evil spirits because they think it will give them power. I play an 18-year-old whom they conjure up. They're doing the same thing that my character did back in 1896. They call me the 'Illuminati.' I warn the girls that what happened to me will happen to them. So I'm their guardian angel in a way."

"I'm brought up from the dead, so I get to wear scary masks. They put a skull mask on me with feathers and they glued that on my face. In the beginning of the movie, I'm conjuring up the evil spirit and then it goes into the present day."

A couple of weeks ago, Hall was reunited with director Fred

Olsen Ray, and **VICIOUS KISS** co-star Monique Parent, for **MAXIMUM SECURITY**. As an investigative reporter, Hall's ambitions provoke her involuntary exile to a prison that's governed by convicts. "She has to fight for her life," enthuses Hall. "I worked with some friends of mine on fight sequences so I could pull them off on-camera. I've actually done a few fights, punches and taking punches. I had a couple of fight scenes with guys in the film. I had a long one with Monique, who is one of the bad guys, where I throw her through a window. I'm glad I got to do some fighting, because that's what I want to get into; some action. I caught on very quickly."

Her summer schedule also includes **JACK AND JILL AND JILL**, ostensibly a love triangle but actually an exploration of alternate lifestyles; lesbianism, once branded taboo in mainstream Hollywood, has turned into a challenge for eminent actresses (see Gina Gershon, page 8, for her screen alliance with Jennifer Tilly in **BOUND**). Hall and Dana Plato play the Jills. Hall's Jill is entwined in an abusive love/hate relationship when Plato's Jill arrives on the scene. "My character is very dependent and naive," explains Hall. "I allow Jack to get control and manipulate me, and screw with my head."

Dana's Jill is working on a shoot with Jack, and our characters are night and day from each other. She's the balley New York woman who doesn't take any shit from anybody. And she's a full-blown lesbian, but I don't know that. While Jack is trying to figure her out, she falls head over heels in love with me."

A friendship blossoms and the two women bond. Finally, no longer tolerant of Jack's intimidation, Jill splits and finds comfort in Jill's eager arms. "That's when the love scene happens," Hall nods, "and she tells me she's gay. I decide I'm going to go for it and see what it's about. I get very torn and confused, because I think I'm a total lesbian. What are my parents going to think?"

The tension inherent in a love-making scene was dissipated by the off-screen rapport between both actresses. "Dana was great to work

LONDON HALL

"I have no problem with nudity, I'm very free and open. If people don't like it, then that's too bad."

with," smiles Hall, "and we got along very well, which made it easy to do the lesbian scenes. It wasn't hard to do because they saved it for the end of the shoot, and we already had developed a friendship and liked each other as women. It was much easier then if they had thrown us into it the first day. It was like a male love scene. It's nice if you can get to know somebody and like that person for who they are. It makes it a lot easier then with somebody you think is a creep. As far as—"

Hall shoots a glance at the wall clock. Four p.m. She sprints to the set of *BUSTED*, a film directed by Corey Feldman, and her hasty exit is a cliffhanger, no time to discuss her role or the plot. No time to discuss whether or not she considers herself locked into t&a. No time to discuss her aspirations. Then again, she may be quite content with her status quo. I mean, most of this town's new arrivals—beauty pageant winners, smalltown models, strippers, all of them floundering for just a blip in a B-film—obviously concur, "London Hall is smokin'!" □

Right: "I won't do nudity unless I play the lead."

Below: Hall's *EROTIC CONFESSIONS* character "is confused about her sexuality."



Gina Gershon Showgirl

CAST WITH JENNIFER TILLY IN A FILM NOIR SLEEPER,
GERSHON PLAYS THE "MALE LEAD" IN THEIR LESBIAN LIAISON.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Survival stories are grist for the tabloids. "I Survived A Tornado"... "I Survived a Grizzly Attack"... "I Survived An Atomic Blast"... "I Survived My Alien Abduction." But all of these disasters are a tempest in a teapot compared to the professional perpetuity of Gina Gershon, she survived SHOWGIRLS. We're talkin' apocalypse on an Irwin Allen scale, a commercial and critical flop, the film threatened to derail the careers of anyone involved in its artificial life. One year after its release, at least two of the participants have emerged unscathed; the aforementioned Ms. Gershon and, metaphorically, screenwriter Joe Eszterhas. What's more, she's qualified for this year's *Esquire* list of "women we love." Gershon has eluded self-destruction because she's an actress, not a movie star. She's spent her ten-year career invariably proving she's better than her movies. But, this year, Gershon has met her



SHOWGIRLS: Gershon describes her character, Cristal Corcoran, as "strong and independent. It's my most physically demanding role. I really had to work my ass off."

match, specifically, a film worthy of her talent. But we're getting ahead of ourselves here.

A native of Woodland Hills, California, Gershon unapologetically notes, "I was like a surfer valley chick. No one ever believes me, but it's true." Her earliest goal, a career in clock n' dagger, evaporated when she was cast in a junior high school production of *Melody Jones*, playing the title role, Gershon's dramatic exercise proved addictive.

Transferring from Boston's Everson College to New York University, Gershon earned her degree in theatre, psychology and philosophy served as her "minor" options. Once enlightened to the competitiveness of her preferred vocation, Gershon bonded together with other aspirant actors; the resultant repertory was christened *The Naked Angels*. "I was definitely there at the beginning," she explains. "I guess there were six founding members and I

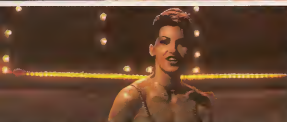
was in the first group. Basically, there was a bunch of us who had worked together before, we went to school together and played baseball together. At the time, we were getting disgruntled because neither EBT or Manhattan Theatre Company was hiring us. So we just said, 'Fuck it,' and started our own group and everyone just started doing incredibly well. It's a great group of actors and writers, with John Robin Bates, Rob Morrow, Maria Tomic, Nancy Travis, Fisher Stevens, Matthew Bred-

erick." Tallying a myriad of credits, including a 1986 production of *Comedie* with Kathleen Turner, Gershon landed a minor role in 3.15—*THE MOMENT OF TRUTH* (1986), directed by Larry Gross. "I was actually in that weird film," she muses. "It was kind of like *HIGH NOON* set in a high school. It was a very strange movie. Mario Van Peebles was in it and I was in it."

Critics acknowledged Gross as "Walter Hall's pro-



Groceries, as Corky, in
SOUND: "The character
is the traditional male
lead, a rebel here like
Clint Eastwood. Corky
doesn't want to get in
anyone's way but if you
fuck with her she'll kill
you. Corky is a loner
who was screwed over!"



SHOWGIRLS Gershon and Elizabeth Berkley strut their *Avenging Angel* stuff on a closed set. **L.A.** As a side act, Gershon gyrated for 900 extras.

tege." Ironically, only two years later, Gershon surfaced at an audition for **RED HEAT**, an Arnold Schwarzenegger shoot-'em-up helmed by Walter Hill. "That was kind of a nice surprise," the actress remembers. "At that point, I hadn't had a lead in a big movie and I kind of went in for a smaller part. After my first meeting with Hill, he asked me to read for the lead. That was a great experience. I got to dance in that and I got to play opposite Schwarzenegger and [James] Belushi. I really adored Walter Hill."

"Schwarzenegger is hysterical. The only problem working with him is that it's hard to stop laughing. He's really one of the funniest guys I've ever met. Sometimes, he'll say things right before you do a take and you just crack up. He makes you laugh too much."

Gershon's character, Cat Manzetti, was "originally named Loretta. Maybe she was going to be black. Walter Hill called me up and said, 'You know, that name doesn't really suit you. Why don't you think up one for yourself?' I thought that was really exciting."

"I liked the idea of calling her Catherine. And the first time that Schwarzenegger or Belushi saw me—I don't remember, but that moment might have gotten cut—they kind of said, 'Cat Manzetti?' and I said, 'It's Catherine.' Everyone called her Cat. She was trying to escape her past and make a real legitimate life for herself. But she's drawn in because of her badass husband. To basically get her life back, she sells out her husband and ends up getting killed because of it."

Climbing up the ladder, Gershon cut her teeth on the inevitable "horror show," cast as an insatiable *femme fatale*, she sampled the genre in "Jar," an episode of the syndicated MONSTERS series.

And then there's the misguided turkey, the one that vanishes from an established thespian's resume, which only foolhardy journalists drop into the conversation. Raising the wrath of Gershon, I delicately pose the question: "By 1989, you did the Schwarzenegger movie and you A had supporting role, opposite Tom Cruise, in COCKTAIL, so whatever possessed you to do a horrible, derivative mess like VOODOO DAWN?" (Yeah, she survived this film, too; but, unlike SHOWGIRLS, nobody knows VOODOO DAWN exists!)

Anyway, she doesn't punch out my lights. Clearing her throat, Gershon explains she "had just gotten back from New Orleans, where I had met this weird voodoo girl. We were hanging out with all these strange people and when I came home, there was a black cat waiting for me on my window sill. All of a sud-

"I really enjoyed CITY OF HOPE; I'd prefer to just do a couple of scenes with great directors. It's more satisfying than a huge part in something that's a disaster."



SOUND: Out in sappy city scenes, Jennifer Tilly and Gershon hid the mob. "We were laughing almost the entire time during our love scenes," relates Tilly.

den, I get this script delivered called VOODOO DAWN. I thought, 'Oh, wow, I should probably do this movie!' I thought it was some kind of weird sign. I realized later on that it's probably not the best way to choose your movie."

"We filmed that in Charleston, South Carolina. I remember we were going to do this one scene and they were getting ready for some ritual. There was all this singing and the produc-

er came up and said, 'I don't want any singing, no chanting, none of that stuff.' And I said, 'But that's their way, it's part of their religion,' and he said, 'I don't want any of that voodoo shit in here.' And here I thought this was a voodoo movie. Actually I do respect the religion of voodoo and all that. Unfortunately, it didn't end up being what I thought it was going to be."

Gershon's ambitions aren't rooted in celebrity

She covets a personalized, even scaled-down role if it yields the opportunity to work with a compassionate director; hence, she approved the part of Laurie in CITY OF HOPE, John Sayles' dramatization of urban life. "A superb cast enlivens even the smallest parts," raved one critic. "John Sayles has the same kind of vibes as Robert Altman," smiles Gershon. "I think it makes a big difference that they both work with the same crews over the years. You get on the set and it's such a pleasant environment that you're allowed to just do your work."

"The picture takes place in New Jersey. It followed this guy's downward spiral. Vinnie Spano played my brother and it's his story. It's about this guy who is always in trouble. As his sister, I'm kind of like his conscience; I'm always lecturing him or giving him money. I just had a couple of scenes but I really enjoyed that film." Obviously speaking from experience, she concludes with, "I like it if I can just do a couple of scenes with really great directors. It's more satisfying than a huge part in something that's a disaster."

Her characterization of Whitney Gersh, one of the pawns in Robert Altman's darkly comic THE PLAYER, was driven by the spontaneity of costarring. "That movie was really a great experience," she enthuses, "because I really wasn't supposed to have a part in that! I was meeting with the producer just so maybe I could be in his next film. Altman happened to walk in and I happened to be wearing horsebock riding pants. He said, 'Oh, you ride horses!' and I said, 'Well, I like betting on them, too.' I didn't realize he was a big gambling guy with the horses, so we talked about the races for a long time and he asked me what I was doing there. I told him I wanted to work with him. He had actually seen CITY OF HOPE and thought I was good in it. I



"I didn't see how SHOWGIRLS was going to survive the hype. I think the press really went after it unfairly. People, who like the film, admit it apologetically."

writer, William Mastrosimone.

"I kind of went in, wanting to play femme fatale Ava Gardner," says Gershon. "But, in the meantime, director James Badwith had seen CITY OF HOPE, which actually got me a lot of jobs. Two of the producers wanted me as Ava but the director, and the other producer, wanted me as the mother."

Gershon was finally cast as Sinatra's neglected-but-tolerant first wife, Nancy. "For me, it was a different sort of part," she says. "I really respect her, she was interesting to play. I just love doing period pieces and I thought it was just such a well-done miniseries. When I met Nancy, I didn't understand her at all. I didn't understand a woman who would never yell or scream. I thought that if this guy was doing this to me, I'd kill him. I thought I'd really have to hang out with Nancy for a while in order to play her. I began to understand her a lot more just by being with her. She's really one of those women who put her heart before her ego, which is kind of rare."

"I kept wanting her to teach me how to make her

sauce, because she is supposed to be an amazing cook. So I said, 'Nancy, if I can only learn to cook like you, it will all click.' I didn't meet Frank until after our show was finished. That was kind of sad because he was at Radio City, and I was so looking forward to hearing him sing. It was the night that he lost his voice and the doctors wouldn't let him go on. He was so disappointed that all those people were waiting to hear him sing, but he really couldn't even speak."

"It was an interesting gig. I really felt like one of the family after a while. That was, emotionally, the most challenging role up to that time and that's why I wanted to do it."

The following year, Gershon returned to the medium for LOVE MATTERS. She was cast in the Showtime movie as Head, a successful investment banker who kindles an obsessive affair with a married man. While occupying the residence of friends (Griffin Dunne and Annette O'Toole), Gershon and Tony Goldwyn unite in a torrid lovemaking tryst that almost literally brings down the house. More significantly, the actress somehow draws sympathy from a decidedly unsympathetic character.

There's an abrupt adrenaline rush, pumped-up over performance, the Naked Angel compares theatre to film: "They're two completely different animals. I love the subtlety of film. What you can show with just an eye movement on film. In theatre you have to use your whole body. It's just a completely different process. Of course, in theatre they can't

SHOWGIRLS: "When I read the script, I really fell in love with Crystal. Director Paul Verhoeven, unlike the quieter [Robert] Altman, likes to yell and laugh."

told him about Naked Angels."

Altman invited Gershon to impart her training on film, even though all formerly vacant roles had been cast. He asked Gershon to draw upon her improvisational aptitude, admitting THE PLAYER was only "a little film" that would likely solicit limited distribution.

"He said, 'It will be two weeks of fun, why don't you do it?' and I said, 'Okay.' He told me to just make up a character and I said, 'Great!' After a while, he had actually written me into the opening scene. You can see why all these actresses are dying to work with Altman. He's very confident and secure with what he's doing. He has little ego. He's the first one to say when something isn't working and he has another idea. This, to me, shows a great deal of confidence and security. He's just

very generous, he likes actors and respects them. It's rare to find really, really great directors."

The TV miniseries, SINATRA, introduced Gershon to mainstream America. A self-professed fan of the singer, Gershon was initially pitched as Sinatra's amoral actress Ava Gardner, by the teleplay's screen-

SOUND: "I wanted my arms to look muscle. Cindy has been in jail for 3 years. She needed tattoos and muscles like imprisoned guys you see in the movies."



cat out your performance—which I love! You can keep on working on it every night and get better and better until you finish it. On film, you have to go to the set knowing exactly what you want to do. You have it all mapped out. I think they're both completely valid. One kind of helps the other for me. The live audience is the fun of it. You kind of play off each other's energy."

Insiders speculated that **SHOWGIRLS** would wield the same star-breaking notoriety for Gershon that the film's director, Paul Verhoeven, wrought for Sharon Stone in **RASCAL INSTINCT**. Casting director Johanna Ray thought of Gershon for the role of Cristal Connors, the Vegas headliner who had dominated the strip. "When I read the script, I really fell in love with Cristal," nods the actress. "I think she's a really great character. I thought they would never cast me. I assumed they'd go with a much more established name."

"This was absolutely my most physically demanding role. I'd been a dancer in high school, but I didn't do this kind of dancing—and I hadn't danced in a couple of years. Two months before we started shooting, I was dancing 8 to 10 hours. Once we started shooting, you're—off and on—dancing 14 hours a day."

"I've always enjoyed the physical and I do martial arts, and I think it would be fun to do an action film. I've always been an athlete, but after doing **SHOWGIRLS**, I thought, 'If I can get through doing this, I can get through doing anything.' Plus, they surrounded me with 25 of the best dancers from L.A. and New York and I had to look better than any of them. I really had to work my ass off for that one. I love any sort of physical challenge, where you have to learn a new activity and



RED MEAT Arnold Schwarzenegger interrogates Gershon: "The problem working with Arnold is that it's hard to stop laughing. He cracks you up!"

really get good at it."

She describes the aforementioned Paul Verhoeven as "wild. It was always pretty exciting working with him. He's very different from, say, Altman. Paul likes to yell and scream and laugh. He's kind of crazy in that way. He's like a little kid and he's all over the place. He's tireless. Altman has a much quieter approach. They're both very smart men."

As the production winded down, Gershon had second thoughts about the hyperbole. The film was promoted less on merit and more on its erotic content risking a NC-17 rating. Topbilled ingenue, Elizabeth Berkley, was traded on the likes of ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT and probed about her abandonment of her squeaky-clean, SAVED BY THE BELL facade.

"Every day, I'd turn on the news and there'd be something on SHOWGIRLS," sighs Gershon, "or Letterman was talking about SHOWGIRLS. It became so incredibly hyped and I thought, 'We're in trouble.' Once you're the focus of that much attention, I just couldn't see how it was going to get past that. I also think that the press really went after it unfairly. People who like it say it in an apologetic way. The press and the media had lambasted it so hard, and so brutally that someone felt weird about saying they enjoyed it. It becomes about everything but the actual film."

Gershon's own divestments were hardly shielded by a closed set. "My nudity scenes, where I'm actually doing the show, involved dancing in front of 600 people. You're on a big stage and you feel that you're actually doing a show. A lot of Elizabeth's stuff was in front of an audience, too. For the nude scenes where it was just Elizabeth and I, it was more of a closed set but—as on most films—people are fairly respectful."

While filming SHOWGIRLS, Gershon was offered

"I love BOUND's film noir setup; I'm the ex-con, Jen [Tilly] is the femme fatale and we fall in love. I get the girl and the money... Crime pays in this movie."



BOUND: Gershon as ex-con Corky. Jennifer Tilly had been pitched for the same role but was cast as Violet, Corky's lover. "Both women are strong," notes Tilly.

a role in Gramercy Pictures' BOUND, a heat film about two lesbian lovers who prove they're a match for the mob. Her representatives, noting the sexual content strayed from a prudent heterosexual armistice, tried to dissuade the actress from complying. But Gershon had already made up her mind. "I really liked the script," she gushes. "What impressed me the most was the writing. I had read other scripts written by the same

directors [Larry and Andy Wachowski]. They wrote the original version of ASSASSINS. Because of their writing, I wanted to meet them and—once I met them—I just got that weird feeling I get sometimes when someone is really good."

While the opposition reminded Gershon that first-time directors may imperil her career, the Wachowski Brothers kept insisting she would be perfect as the Corky character. "Corky, to

me, was just such a great opportunity for an actress because it's the traditional male lead, the quiet hero, it's traditionally like one of those Clint Eastwood parts. I really loved that. She's a woman who's been in jail for the last five years of her life. She's a quiet loner who's always looking over her back. She doesn't want to get in anyone's way—but if you fuck with her, she'll kill you. She doesn't trust anyone and that's kind of her quiet arc in the film. She learns to trust Violet, played by Jennifer Tilly [FF 6.8], and actually falls in love. Corky is definitely a lesbian and was screwed over by her last romantic encounter, which was with a woman."

Already experienced in kick-boxing and Ta Kwon Do, Gershon added boxing to her regimen because "Corky needed that kind of energy. I wanted my arms to look really macho. I thought 'Well, I've been in jail for five years. I need tattoos and muscles like all those guys, you see in the movies, when they come out of jail.'"

"I love it because it's that typical film noir setup, where you have the ex-con who just got out of jail, the ex-con Robert Mitchum guy meets the femme fatale and she seduces him into screwing over her mob boyfriend, and then she screws over the ex-con. In this case, I'm the ex-con. Jennifer is the femme fatale and we actually fall in love along the way and, at the end of the movie, I get the girl and the money. It's a win-win situation. Crime pays in this movie."

Tilly and Gershon united for a graphic love scene that the directors filmed in one continuous take, sans cutaways. "Out of all the love scenes I've done," asserts Gershon, "that was definitely the most technical. Basically, the camera would start at our heads. They'd take out the wall, where the camera was, as it started creeping around our bodies. Then that wall would go up, and the other wall would retract, so you had these col-



laping walls around us. They were yelling out where the camera was and telling us to, 'Move your arm... Move your leg... Kiss her.' We had to be in to what we were doing, but we didn't know where the camera was. We had to really choreograph the whole thing with the walls and with the camera, and with me and Jennifer and the bed sheets. It was interesting.

"Actually, I was only nervous about my tattoo, I hadn't shown it to them and I was really adamant about it. I have a really groovy tattoo that's right on my left hip. You never see it in the movie until my clothes are

off."

She rarely loses her smile. Good reason. While Hollywood's rationing of women's roles is routinely rebutted, Gershon's decade-old legacy isn't mired in stereotype. "I feel I've been lucky with the parts that I've been getting," she says, parking her right palm under her chin. "The last few have been really strong women. Cristal is certainly strong, independent. I think that roles for women seem to be getting better."

Earlier this year, Gershon performed a cameo role in *TOUCH* for director Paul Schrader: "I got to

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Gershon is aptly named "Heat" in Schrader's *LOVE MATTERS*. As Annette O'Toole's housekeeper (L), she looks in a hard state with a married man.





ANIME GIRL APOLLO SMILE

SHE'S THE HUMAN EMBODIMENT OF JAPANESE TOONS.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Introduction. Japanese anime heroines—caricatures of bobbysoxer chastity, who cheerfully brandish sobers—have traversed from their native country and landed in America. Anime addicts have dropped us letters and E-Mail, requesting profiles with the more popular icons who have migrated from comic books to the multimedia. Alas, the perky nymphs can only be “channeled” through their Japanese illustrators. Sans subtitles, I compromised by chatting with the only American incarnate of Japan’s anime matriarchy.

Trumpeting their anatomic similarities to Jessica Rabbit, red-tressed starlets attire themselves in slit, scarlet evening gowns for photo ops. Apollo Smile, accentuating her own embodiment of a decidedly less Anglicized toon, has developed an alter ego called the *Lux Action Anime Girl*, her affection for Japanese animation, science fiction and Hong Kong cinema are merged into the composite character’s psyche.

The slim blonde was raised in the woods of Con-

The “cartoon” prototype for Apollo Smile’s Japanese Anime character, soon to surface as an animated film.





Apelle Smiles poses with Hello Kitty, a premier Japanese toy. The dancer/singer is a representative for Andrew Crash, "the best retail store in New York City for anime and manga [comic books] and Oriental media fix-its."



Top: "Through my partner's love of anime and Japanese comic book culture, he saw how much I look like the Japanese animated characters. His vision, and my musical abilities, put the concept together." Smile's heroines, a flesh 'n' blood replication of Japanese anime, will be rendered into an animated average (below)

necktie. By the time she reached the age of 18, Smile moved to New York City. During the next couple of years, she danced with Alvin Alley. Smile's aptitude for singing landed her a contract with Geffen Records, her songwriting ability prompted an introduction to one of the company's A&R representatives. Her resultant debut album, *Apollo Smile*—vocal selections include *Dune Buggy* and *Thunderbox*—was released in 1991. Smith's serenading skills were also applied to *DAYS OF THUNDER*, specifically the soundtrack of Tom Cruise's fast-car fantasy.

Tapping into Japan's burgeoning cartoon industry, Smile assimilated her mind—and body—into the cul-



ture's two-dimensional maidenhood. "Basically, I'm my own original Japanese animated character come-to-life," she explains. "So much of what I do is anime-related. My partner, Douglas di Menna, is the creative director and fashion photographer. Through his love of anime and the Japanese Manga (comic book) culture, he saw how much I look like the Japanese animated characters. And through his vision and my musical and dancing abilities, we put this concept together."

Smile's roadshow act includes a demonstration of martial arts movements. "I've been training in martial arts for a while and now I'm a yellow belt," she advises. "I train in jujitsu,

tae kwon do and a little bit in karate. I'm told I have incredible strength and flexibility for my size. With martial arts, it's so groovy because you don't have to be a giant sumo wrestler to intimidate people. You can do a few quick moves—even someone as small as me!—and take down 200-pound guys. It's a big influence for my character because not only do I train in real life, but my character—*Live Action Anime Girl*—really does know how to do the moves and really does train."

Of course, the prolific entertainer's talents are tallied on her resume; there's singin', dancin' and—axe-throwin'?? "Living in Connecticut, you cut down a lot of trees in the winter time," Smile clarifies, "My dad started me axe-throwing when I was seven or eight years old. In my hometown, they would have axe and knife-throwing contests and I was the only girl to enter. I'd get up there and challenge them and win. I made my daddy proud."

Among her gigs is representation for a premiere outlet of Oriental film memorabilia. "Anime Crash is my absolute favorite store in Manhattan," she beams. "They're the best retail store in New York City for Japanese anime and Manga and Hong Kong cinema. Through our mutual love, they promote a lot of conventions where I'm scheduled to perform. I'm also their celebrity guest host for when they do events like debuting *GHOST IN THE SHELL*, which is the most expensive Japanese animated film ever made. I got to guest host the premiere in New York City, which was very excellent."

I inquire about her wardrobe...I mean, you don't pick up glistening, skintight fighting suits off the rack at Macy's. "I design all my own costumes," Smile proudly grins. "Growing up, my mother taught me how to

APOLLO SMILE

"I'm my own Japanese-animated character come to life; my influence has been BARBARELLA and sci-fi films, from the '60s and '70s, that resonate with a distinct Japanese style."



Smile steps into her *Live Action Anime Girl* persona; the background is a collage of illustrations adapting her live character into a manga heroine.

use the sewing machine just like my dad taught me to throw axes. My costume design is predominantly influenced through my love of BARBARELLA and science fiction films, of the '60s and '70s, that resonated with a distinct Japanese style. I can absolutely execute movements—dance and fighting—in everything I design because this kind of choreography is a critical part of my show. I'm cautious enough to tailor fabrics that offer me full liberty to kick, throw punches or block." Smile's futuristic weapons—guns, swords and holsters—are designed by the aforementioned Mr. di Meola.

Performing at genre-oriented conclaves, including New Jersey's bi-annual Chiller Theatre, Smile is "constantly in character. In a live show on tour, I perform with a backing track of my own original music. I routinely kick-off in a slick, black leather jacket or a satin, white and pink-hearted coat. I usually undress myself very quickly, then I get out and do my songs. I sing live, and do my own stage blocking and setting up. On stage, I use everything—my singing and dancing background and all my martial arts training."

Smile is preparing to tour the country that kindled the birth of her human toon. "Japan is a huge target for me," she asserts. "I can't wait to get out there and perform for everybody. I've received plenty of invitations." A couple of months ago, Smile released a CD single called *Trigger Finger*, which she recorded in English and Japanese. "In Japan, it's called *Hikigane*. I've learned to sing in Japanese and I'm taking lessons in Japanese. We're working on my own manga—a comic book based on 'Apollo Smile, Live Action Anime Girl'—and an animated video of the character." □

HUNTER

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"It's very heady stuff. I think David Cronenberg has talked about it in terms of the fact that our technology has so eclipsed us. We are so sophisticated now with communications, with our technological evolution in the world, that we haven't kept up spiritually. So what it has forced us to do is to recede in a way that's made us more primitive than ever. Our impulses are more primal than they were before because the gap has widened. There's this huge chasm that we're looking into, we're fractured... as CRASH explores that fragmentation."

Hunter's admiration for Cronenberg is unbridled; it's likely the director may be her entire raison d'être for risking the very provocative role. "The film was delightful to make because David Cronenberg is delightful. He has no conflict about why he's making movies, he has no conflict about his vision." Possibly referring to the Cannes reception, Hunter notes, "He doesn't worry about 'How will this be received?' He doesn't think, 'Will I be condemned?' or 'Will I be applauded?' He's at another altar and it's a very creative and pure one. And those are the kind of filmmakers I want to work with. These are the only ones, now. It's a clean experience and it has a real clean feeling. When you work with someone like David Cronenberg, you're working with someone who across the black side of us, who serves all the black impulses in a quite free way. So he's a great guy to hang out with. His sets are very lovely places to work and everybody's happy to be there. It was a delightful experience making CRASH, truly." □

CRYPST

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lead," she says. "That was shot in Hong Kong. There was a lot of fighting and a couple of monsters in that, too. It's a trendy field right now and a lot of actors are trying to get into it. This is like a film shot on CDK. The player interacts with the actor and, basically, becomes the main lead. I play this girl who leads them through the whole game. The mission is to unite two halves of a



Holly Hunter stars as Dr. Helen Armstrong in CRASH, written and directed by David Cronenberg. The NC-17 release has been put off until early 1997.

mystical mask. Half the mask is owned by a good guy and the other half is owned by a bad guy. The player has to get the half that is owned by the bad guy so that the world will be controlled by benevolent powers."

Her bonding with the genre is buttressed by "Come the Dawn," a TALES FROM THE CRYPT episode. Wu gladly abandoned her former "screamer" obligations; an enigmatic presence as Jeri Drumbeater, she guides a pair of merciless killers into the frozen wastelands to hunt endangered bears. Guess who survives?

"I watch TALES FROM THE CRYPT and I was always impressed by how many good actors they can get to do that show," Wu nods. "When my agent called, I said of course I'll do it! I originally read for another episode, but they went with someone else. A week later, I got an offer to do this part. The director, John Herzfeld, had seen my performance on VANISHING SON and he had liked my work."

"I enjoyed the role because it was so different from my own personality. My part is about a woman who is wounded in the war because of the orders of this egomaniac colonel, and her whole life is ruined. She has this anger in her and when the opportunity shows up, she takes her re-

venge by recruiting her town's vampire populace. While a seldom in the Desert Storm operation, Drumbeater was in a tank and she got something on her chest so she's deformed. Her deformity somehow made her immune to the vampires. Now, that doesn't make sense [laughs]."

Wu's television work hasn't been limited to her visit with the Cryptkeeper. She has guest starred on THE UNTOUCHABLES, L.A. LAW, MURDER SHE WROTE, et al. She spent four months working on the VANISHING SON, a four-part miniseries for Universal. "I played Lili, a Chinese woman. The story concerns how she managed her life in America and her love relationship towards two brothers. It's a triangle love story. I got killed in that, too [laughs]. In all my roles, so far, I either got killed or have to share a man with five other women. Very dramatic!"

The actress traveled to Vancouver for a role as a Mongolian immortal on THE HIGHLANDER TV series. Unfortunately, her character was once again denied the option of dying of old age. "I was a friend of Connor MacLeod, the title character. I coached him and taught him one of the Chinese martial arts. And then I was killed, my head was cut off in a not-honorable way."

Wu's unben with lauded directors is seemingly progressive. One of her latest projects is PILLOW BOOK, helmed by the eclectic Peter Greenaway (THE COOK, THE THEFT, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER). "I play the leading girl," notes Wu. "I play a strong half Chinese-half Japanese woman who has this obsession with becoming a writer. She enjoys getting her body painted by calligraphy and is taking her eternal revenge. It's the biggest challenge of my career. It's very artistic, and I have enormous respect for Greenaway's work. It's going to be very intense." □

GINA GERSHON

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wear a blonde wig. I'm like one of these obnoxious show boys. It's a really fun cast with Christopher Walken, Bridget Fonda and Tom Arnold."

She's currently occupied with THIS WORLD, THEN THE FIREWORKS, adapted from Jim Thompson's novel. "It's about these brother and sister twins in the 1950s. They're a little bit psychotic in the way they see the world. They're real Jim Thompson characters. They're psychotic killers. I play the twin Carol who's kind of like this fragile, very fragmented flower and Billy Zane plays my brother."

Between pictures, it's likely she packs a cellular phone. Concluding her SHOWGIRLS schedule, Gershon spent six months traveling in the south of France, Greece, Italy and Cuba. But she hasn't forfeited her athletic training. During a trip to Utah, Gershon was reacquainted with a favorite past time. "I used to do a lot," she says, "and then I went up to Sundance for BOUND and started all over again. I was pushing myself to keep up with the big guys. When I discovered that I was really good at it, I liked it."

Gershon's next role? Maybe a merger of those espionage opers, conceived during childhood, and the femme fatale. "I've been toying with something I've always wanted to do. Flamenco dancing. I wanted to play some flamenco dancer/spy woman. I thought I should start learning it now so when that part comes along, I'll be ready for it." □

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LETTERS

FUDGING 'SCI-FI'S SEXY 50' (5/5): PART I

Good Golly, Miss Molly! How did you Miss Molly Ringold? She's had two "femme fatale" roles in the past 15 months: *MALICIOUS* and *BATA*.

Give Molly her due. How about a cover?

Bill (Parker?)
New York, New York

You sunk Jennifer Connolly to #17 out of 50? S'matter, you blind? She's a natural—in fact, she's old natural (nonsensually). Jenny can play innocent and duplicitous femme fatales who feign innocence. How about a cover story?

Jay Glazer
Virginia Beach, Va.

Always enjoy Mark Altman's profiles, but, obviously, the man can't count. Alyssa Milano should have added up to the #1 spot on Mark's "Sexy 50" list. C'mon, everyone is blown away that the former daddy's girl is a femme fatale—or have you forgotten your own coverage of her '86 release, *EMBRACE OF THE VAMPIRE* (FF 3/4)? Have you considered a centerfold story?

George Ullman
Silver Spring, MD.

Among the most glaring omissions were Patricia Belf, Michelle Khan, Linda Fiorentino, Athena Massey, Vivian Schilling, Barbara Hershey, Cristi Harris, Denise Duff, Bridget Fonda, Ancha Kinkade, Traci Lords, Rachel Welch, Debi Mazza and—uh—gimme a minute.

Tom Ginn
Los Angeles, California

THE SWAN

Great feature on Krusty Swanson (FF 5/2). *THE PHANTOM* was the most fun I had all summer, saw it three times. I especially liked Krusty's kind words for co-star Treat Williams. For both actors, the opportunity to play comic book characters—when they once read about in the *FERRY* papers—must have been like a childhood dream come true.

Charles Finley
Venice, Florida

FF staffer Don Scapperotti did a great job on the sexy Krusty Swanson. She comes across as a sexier Grace Kelly, elegant and sexy.

Regarding the "Fatale Attractions" (page 62), mention is made of *EMBRACE OF THE VAMPIRE* II and the quest for its star Christina Applegate (the vixenish "Kelly" on *MARRIED WITH CHILDREN*) is my choice. She was a bad-ass girl in her mainstream film, *WILD BILL*, with Jeff Bridges. Pass this on to Ministry of Film executive, Ladd Vance.

Bill Morgan
New York, New York

GAIL FORCE

My all-time favorite femme fatales, when you interviewed in your magazine Michelle Pfeiffer, Michelle Bauer, Gail Harris (whose career who should be updated much more often) and Elvira.

BUT you seem to always overlook one of the all-time pros; someday, you've got to interview Julie Newmar, the original Catwoman from the *BATMAN* television series (1966-68).

And I mean what I said about Gail Harris, too. She recently completed her tenure as a producer on *ALIEN ESCAPE*. Give her more coverage!

Jason Sedrecht
Sarasota, Florida

[Ms. Newmar was recently interviewed by FF staffer Ancha Kinkade and photographed by Richard Hupp; check out our next issue for a profile on the feline femme. In regard to Ms. Harris, look no further than pages 5 and 7.]

SALMA VAMPS AGAIN?

Just saw *FLED*, and I'm hungry for more Salma Hayek. How about a follow-up to her original interview (FF 4/6)? Loved Salma in *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*; any chance that her outtakes from the film will turn-up on video or a special laser edition? Sorry if I'm pushing, but the unlikelihood of a *DUSK* sequel makes me a



You need for it! Marital arts star Kathy Long poses for FF photographer Jan Stern.

little more manic about collecting everything on Salma's role. I'm sure I'm not the only reader who thinks Salma is the siliest femme fatale for the '90s.

Howard Browne
Gibbs, Ohio

[*Surprise!* Though *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* grossed only so-so business, a sequel is in the works. Quentin Tarantino will serve as executive producer of the Miramax production. Part II has been scripted by Duane Whitaker, who performed a supporting role in *PULP FICTION* and had previously written a screenplay titled *STRIPTSEASER*—for producer Roger Corman. Will Ms. Hayek reprise her role as stripper Santanico Pandemonium? At the present, the only thing I can tell you is that the Titty Twister is back. I leave Whitaker. One more thing: *Nikki Fries*, profiled last issue, "could look to be cast as the Titty Twister patchman originally played by Cheech Marin."]

LONG SHOT

My hat's off to Cynthia Rothrock for unveiling her femininity in FF 4.1. Strength and sex appeal! I suppose both this is an intimidating

challenge to casting directors, most especially in Hollywood. How about a similar spread on other movie "marital arts" liberties? As a spokesperson for the genre, may I suggest Kathy Long? Cynthia may have been tough to negotiate into a real sexy shoot, but Kathy may be tougher. By the way, loved Tina Berg's dialogue with Kathy (page 62, same issue as Cynthia).

Julius Stephens
Salem, Mass.

[We've kept this letter, and other correspondence related to Kathy Long, on file for over a year. Now is the appropriate time to make the following announcement; thanks to combined influences of writer Jay Romano and photographer Jan Stern, Ms. Long has posed for a scorchy FF spread. Check the results, in a forthcoming issue.]

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Plus, in the same issue, the career of actress Kim Cattrall, star of *PORKY'S*, *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA* and *STAR TREK VI*, who talks about why her proposed biopic about pin-up star Bettie Page never got off the ground. Subscribe now at our special money-saving rates!

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